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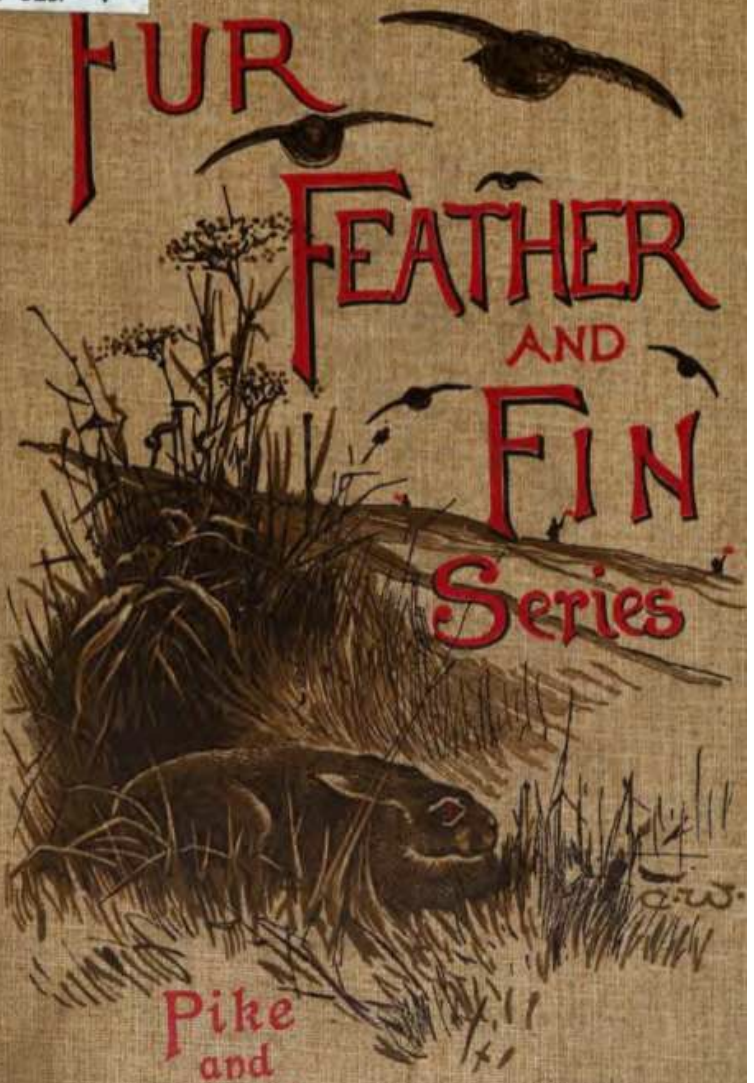

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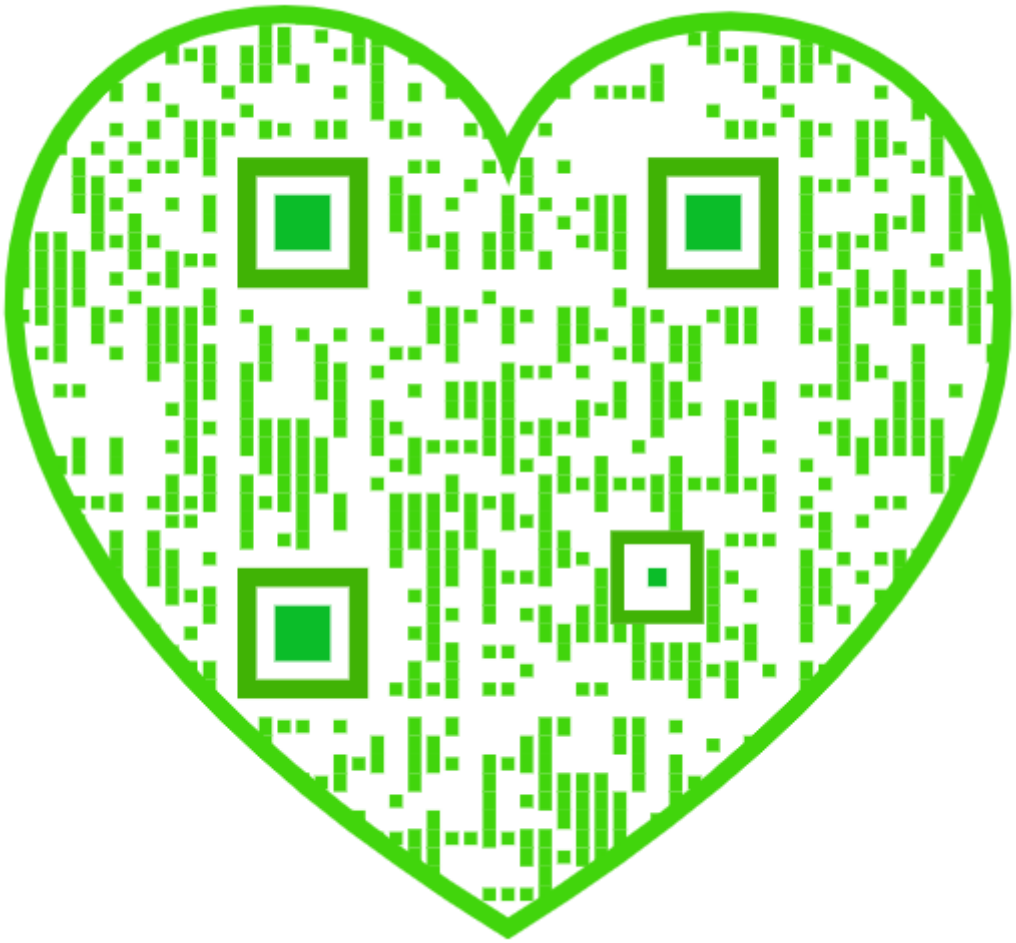

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BY

WILLIAM SENIOR

('REDSPINNER,' EDITOR OF 'THE FIELD')

WITH CHAPTERS BY

'JOHN BICKERDYKE' AND W. H. POPE

COOKERY

BY

ALEXANDER INNES SHAND

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE ROLLER AND FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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PREFACE

The design of the Fur, Feather, and Fin Series is to present monographs, as complete as they can possibly be made, on the various English birds, beasts, and fishes which are generally included under the head of Game.

Books on Natural History cover such a vast number of subjects that their writers necessarily find it impossible to deal with each in a really comprehensive manner ; and it is not within the scope of such works exhaustively to discuss the animals described in the light of objects of sport. Books on sport, again, seldom treat at length of the Natural History of the creatures which are shot or otherwise taken ; and, so far as the Editor is aware, in no book hitherto published on Natural History or Sport has information been given as to the best methods of turning the contents of the bag to account.

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Each volume of the present Series will, therefore, be devoted to a bird, beast, or fish. Their origin will be traced, their birth and breeding described, every known method of circumventing and killing them—not omitting the methods employed by the poacher—will be explained ,with special regard to modern developments, and they will only be left when on the table in the most appetising forms which the delicate science of cookery has discovered.

ALFRED E. T. WATSON.

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THE PIKE

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CHAPTER I

THE PIKE OF FABLE AND FANCY

We may not deny the popularity of the pike, for there is no British freshwater fish better known amongst the masses. 'The classes' of course place their salmon and trout first, and other species thereafter anywhere or nowhere, admitting the pike, nevertheless, very often as a sporting, if not a technically game fish. But the pike—or, as it is more commonly termed, the jack—is to our countryfolk in England still the fish of fishes. It may be different in the next generation, when the modern system of fish culture has had time to develop, and pike have been ousted to make room for something of more value as a rent producer. At present in rural districts the pike remains what it has been from time immemorial, the type of mastership and headship among the denizens of our lakes and rivers.

It would be vain to speculate upon the reasons

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mems^^*

for this distinction, for the pike is not now a favourite article of food and has no lovable qualities. Perhaps it is because he has none of the ordinary claims to popularity that he is held in a certain degree of respect, yet without affection or admiration. My own conclusion is that the eminence he enjoys is due not a little to the belief that he is the representative in water of the British bulldog on land; in other words, that in a way he reflects the national character of dominancy, tenacity, and pluck. He is the conqueror before whom all other fishes scatter in flight; the bold, predatory adventurer who keeps the tribes of smaller species in subjection. For these supposed commendable qualities his ferocity, unscrupulous-ness, and tyranny are overlooked or forgiven.

The pike is also a fish of some mystery, with an uncanny appearance and an ogreish reputation. The brilliantly marked perch, the silver-sided roach and dace swim in shoals; and the village children love to watch them cruising in harmonious family parties among the water-lilies, evidently enjoying life to the full. But the long, sharp-nosed pike, lying low, with sinister eye almost on the top of its flat head, is all the difference between friend and foe; it is a fish to inspire dread, not confidence. There are probably many readers of these lines who may remember

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after long years the sensation of fear arising in the boy angler at his first sight of a pike, prowling all solitary, in stealthy pursuit of a victim, past the bush by which he sits watching the float, which, like Joseph's coat, is of many colours.

This instinctive aversion is based very largely upon exaggerated tales of cruelty and prowess, but the bad name which the pike inherits, coupled with the known tendencies of its nature and the forbidding appearance characteristic of the breed, may well account for public opinion with regard to a fish which has been called a freshwater shark, a wolf, and a tiger. Nature, in fact, made the pike a predatory fish of the first order, and it must take the consequences of the evidence which true and false witnesses have combined to heap upon its name. To be known as a devourer of ducks, moorhens, rats, and every kind of fish, and to be suspected of assaults upon quadrupeds and mankind itself, are sufficient to make the name bad indeed. Punch's pike which flew at the immortal Briggs and barked like a dog was, after all, but an embodiment of the simple faith of many generations.

That the disappearance of the smaller wild-fowl is caused by pike admits of no question, and dear old Izaak Walton was not perhaps so very credulous when he accepted the stories of older writers now

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discarded. Better naturalists than he heard without scepticism that two geese had been taken at one time from the interior of a pike, that a swimming dog was not safe from it, that a maid washing clothes in a pond had her foot seized by a pike, and that a mule, lowering its head to drink, was held prisoner by one which hung on with such grip that it was drawn out of water by the quadruped.

The old local history books furnish the materials for many of these narratives of ferocity, and some of them are very circumstantial. Sir John Hawkins, for example, repeats, from a London paper of 1705, an account of the draining down of a pool in Shropshire. It had not been fished for ages, and, as a suggested consequence, a gigantic pike of upwards of 170 lb. was discovered, and hauled up by a rope in the presence of hundreds of spectators. It was * thought to be the largest ever seen.' To this statement was added as an anti-climax that some time previously the clerk of the parish was trolling in the pool and was jerked into it by the sudden force of the strike at the bait, * and it doubtless would have devoured him also had he not by wonderful agility and dexterous

swimming escaped the dreadful jaws of this voracious animal.' Had there been a fish of such weight, and the rod and tackle sufficiently strong, the occurrence

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would not have been absolutely improbable ; the story would, therefore, be naturally converted into a country legend and passed down from father to son.

History honours the pike more perhaps than any other of its freshwater congeners, more than the Salmonidae and more than the carp, which is understood to have been introduced into England during the Middle Ages, and finds frequent mention in Elizabethan times. Historical footmarks, however, are often somewhat uncertain, and must not be taken for more than they are worth.

In matters of this kind one always turns to the Rev. C. D. Badham, M.D., who so frankly announces (' Prose Halieutics, or Ancient and Modern Fish Tattle') that his aim is to treat of fish ichthyo-phagously, rather than ichthyologically, and to give, not fish science, but fish tattle. Let it therefore be noted that, in his chapter on the Esocidae or pikes, he broaches the conjecture that the sacred fish, the oxyrhynchus of the Nile, supposed to spring from the wounds of Osiris, was the true ancestor of the pike; hence an

Egyptian sect which would not touch any fish taken by a hook, because they paid special deference to the oxyrhynchus. The pike has evidently been made a subject of mystery and wonder from the beginning. Did not a famous Goth die of

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fright, mistaking for. the head of a person whom he had killed a pike's head on the table ?

Leland, it is true, states that a monster pike came out of Huntingdonshire in the year 958, during the reign of King Edgar, and it appears as a marketable article, priced a little higher than the salmon, in the time of Edward III. Yarrell seems to imagine that, although pike existed, they were very rare in England, though it is he who first began to point out that the fish was held in good estimation in the latter part of the thirteenth century, when the Edward above-named, as the father of his good people, fixed the prices of the different sorts of fish then brought to market, and ranked the pike not only above salmon, but as being ten times more valuable than the best turbot or cod. It is Yarrell who calls Chauqer into the witness-box, with his:

Full many a fair patrich hadde he in mewe, And many a Breme and many a Luce in stewe.

An Act of the sixth year of Richard II. relative to the fish of the market mentions the pike, and among the annals is an account of the great feast given by George Nevill, Archbishop of York, in the year 1466, pike being one of the dishes served up. Yet the species might have been fished out to some extent in the reign of Henry VIII., for the same authority tells

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us that a large pike sold for double the price of a house lamb in February, while a pickerel was more valuable than a fat capon. All this may mean that the pike of the Merrie England of that date had suffered from the condition of affairs to which the Reformation put an end. With so many abbeys and monasteries in the country the fish had become a monopoly, and thus were looked after by the good people who every week had reason for singing * tomorrow will be Friday.' The monasteries were at any rate grateful, as the arms of Calder Abbey, largely endowed by the Lucy family, included a pike as its leading idea.

If there is a fish which we may reasonably suppose to have been indigenous, we should say the pike had as fair a chance

as any to the distinction; indeed, among the ingenious speculations which writer after writer has indulged in to explain why the fish is called the pike, is one that it was derived from the Saxon word * piik,' signifying sharp-pointed. Dr. Day—who, until a better man takes up the study, must remain our standard authority on the British freshwater fishes— mentions 'hacod' as being the Anglo-Saxon name, and this is probably why a large pike in Cambridgeshire used to be called ' naked/ It will be enough if we regard the fish as an old English friend, for the

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familiar lines have been passed on by generations of authors to prove that Ausonius, even before the days of Edgar, wrote :

The wary luce, midst wrack and rushes hid, The scourge and terror of the scaly brood, Unknown at friendship's hospitable board, Smokes 'midst the smoky tavern's coarsest food.

When we descend to the debatable land of fancy we find the pike figuring in a variety of ways, and in considering the various pike stories that have been told and credited, I may be allowed to suggest that some of the legends, for all we

can prove, may be facts. We cannot disprove them. This is a matter, however, on which the reader must exercise his individual judgment. The yarn that has probably most attracted the attention of all who have read fishing literature is that of the wonderful pike which is the Jack-the-Giantkiller object among fish yarns:

I am the fish which was first of all put into this lake by the hands of the Governour of the Universe, Frederick II., Oct. 5, 1230.

This is the central face of the Greek inscription on the flattened side of a brass ring said to have been found attached to a grisly old pike in Kaiserweg Lake, where you are required to believe it had lived to the age of 267 years. This fish and its

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ring have served the printing page so faithfully since at least a black letter copy of Gesner, published in Heidelberg in 1606, that we may for the moment treat it seriously. Besides, did not Mr. Cholmondeley Pennell, in his ' Book of the Pike/ give a facsimile of the ring, inscription and all, as found by his friend Frank Buckland in a copy of Gesner ? But it need

scarcely be said that it is not everybody who has swallowed the story that the ring, and the skeleton of the pike, measuring nineteen feet in length, were during long years preserved in the Cathedral of Mannheim. Unfortunately, an anatomist who knew what the bones of a fish should be was mean enough to enter into a cruelly scientific calculation, with the result of proof that the relic had been artificially lengthened to coincide with the statements. The legend is that in his career of two and a half centuries the monster had arrived at the decent solid weight of 350 lb.

Amongst the fishes of fancy are a brown pike that embodies the Evil One; a phallical pike with golden fins ; a pike begotten by the west wind; and students of totemism find the pike amongst the traditions of the Red Indian tribes.

The medicinal properties of the pike may without offence be included in this chapter, the reader as

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before being left to take his choice as to whether it is history, fancy, or fable. How could the idea, for example, have arisen that the eyes of a pike turned into powder were useful as a cosmetic ? We are gravely told that a stone like crystal

is found in the brain of a pike; that the jawbone beaten up into dust is healthful for pleurisies and other complaints ; and that the heart of the fish is a remedy against paroxysms.

Some reader may be shocked if amongst the doubtful records is here included the once universal belief as to the relations between the pike and the tench. For centuries it was asserted, and evidently received as gospel, that the tench was really the pike's physician. This was apparently based upon the assumption that the predatory fish never attacked the more modest tench, and even in modern times one is occasionally confronted with the statement that no instance is recorded of a pike attacking a tench. I have, however, myself caught a pike with a light-coloured tench used as a live bait. I know that many anglers have made the experiment in the hope of disproving the old-fashioned notion, and have failed to tempt the pike into seizing a tench. The very latest work on pike fishing, 'John Bickerdyke's,' deals with this subject, and he states on the authority of a well-

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known taxidermist that several large tench, weighing between two and three pounds each, were taken from the stomachs of pike sent to him to stuft.

The pike, for reasons doubtless satisfactory to himself but

unknown to us, will not attack a tench if there are other fish to be found. Of the freshwater fishes that he has the pleasure of chasing the tench is probably in most waters the most unfamiliar. The pike of four or five pounds which I caught with a small tench, somewhat more golden-hued than is usually the case, was taken in what in Lancashire is called a ' lodge/ where the fish live under very artificial conditions, and it was the fact that the majority of the fish in this rectangular reservoir or tank were tench. These fish, moreover, are supposed to lie very low, if not in the mud, during the winter, and are seldom seen except during the spawning time, when they come to the top of the water.

The supposition of all ancient and some comparatively modern authors that the tench is furnished with a sort of curative slime or saliva is pure, if pretty, fancy, and it may be ranked with the old idea that the fish had the extraordinary gift of healing humanity. Camden is responsible for the story of a pike whose bowels were ripped open being instantaneously healed by the touch of a tench. The tench is a very

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dark-coloured fish, at certain times of the year it is as slimy

as a bream, and the whole story probably simply comes to this, that the pike does not ' hanker after' such diet. When hard set we may be certain that the pike will not stop short at any living thing within its range of snap. The story as to the tench at any rate gave Moses Browne the opportunity of working his ideas up to the following outburst:

The Pike, fell tyrant of the liquid plain, With ravenous waste devours his fellow train ; Yet howsoe'er by raging famine pined, The tench he spares—a medicinal kind ; For when by wounds distrest and sore disease, He courts the salutary fish for ease, Close to his scales the kind physician glides, And sweats a healing balsam from his sides.

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CHAPTER II

THE PIKE OF FACT

The legendary treatment of pike has, it might not inaptly be said, become a habit with us. The fish story has not a little unjustly become a synonym of impudent mendacity. But there is no need to enter into an inquiry as to why this misfortune should be fastened upon a class of sportsmen who, on the authority of sweet-natured Izaak Walton, are all honest men. One reason, of course, is the large margin left for speculation

by circumstances over which we have no control. The lost fish is always forsooth —and very properly—the biggest, and there need be no limit within reasonable bounds to the dimensions of the monster that breaks away from your line. The pike is a most convenient fish for the exercise of imagination. He is frequently caught unexpectedly on tackle wholly unsuited for the work, and so abruptly severs the bonds that hold him.

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In a recent number of the ' Field,' for example, there was a story of a lad who, fishing for perch in Ireland with a light trout rod and float tackle, hooked a pike, which in a very clever manner he killed, and it was of the decent dimensions of 15 lb. Had that pike got away, as it might have been expected he would have done, we should certainly have had another legend of a 40- or 50-pounder lost.

Presuming then that there is some excuse for the stories of monster pike, I will here assure the friendly reader that it is not my intention to enter into the very vexed question of large pike. The speculation is always profitless. The subject is treated of in every angling book that treats of the fish, and periodically we have controversies upon the matter in the weekly press. The late Lord Inverurie exhibited keen interest in the whole question, and tried very earnestly to reduce the

records of big pike to something like order; the young nobleman took immense trouble to collate such materials as he could get as solid foundation for some worthy confession of faith. They were necessarily incomplete, for it would be a matter of impossibility without visiting every considerable country house to speak with fulness. I myself and my friend John Bickerdyke once strove diligently to obtain facts, and our conclusion

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was that there was no evidence, which could be considered beyond dispute, of any pike of modern times that exceeded the weight of 40 lb.

There is a good deal of circumstantial evidence, however, to warrant one in believing that fish of 50 lb. or 60 lb. do exist, and will some day be clearly produced. There must be some leviathans in the loughs of Ireland. There have been such often reported from that country, but attempts to sift the rumours always leave some uncomfortable gap in the evidence. When one reads an airy statement that there was a 90-lb. pike taken in Ireland many years ago, the only evidence being that of the narrator who says he saw the fish weighed and that it brought the scales down at this weight, one's duty is to put it aside as a thing possible but not probable.

Two or three years ago there was what seemed to be a categorical story of a 53-lb. pike that had been caught as usual across St. George's Channel. Evidence was invited as to details of the capture, with special reference to (1) where was the fish weighed? (2) how was it weighed ? and (3) who witnessed the weighing ? To none of these questions was there a satisfactory answer, and, in a word, the generality of large pike are found upon inquiry to be of this dubious category.

Lord Inverurie begins his list with a fish of 49J lb.

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weight, caught in 1784 in the month of June in Loch Petuliche, Scotland, by Colonel Thornton. That is definite so far as it goes, but fhe entire story is surrounded with suspicion, though a drawing of the fish appeared in the * Sporting Magazine' of the year mentioned. The Colonel, however, was not quite the man to swear by in matters of sport. It is stated in the Inverurie list that the fish was caught by trolling; but I have read in another place that it was taken on a night line, and in yet another that it was caught with a fly. As the gallant Colonel, however, states that from Lochaber a pike of 146 lb. was taken, we may put down his

authority as doubtful.

A very much discussed monster is the famous Kenmure pike immortalised by a succession of writers, and worthy of some consideration. The fish was started at 72 lb., was reported from Loch Ken in Galloway, a not unlikely water for a big fish, and is referred to rather strangely by Stoddart as having been taken with a rod and fly. The head of the fish was, and probably is still, preserved in the castle at Kenmure, and Mr. Cholmondeley Pennell made personal inquiries into the records. The Hon. Mrs. Bellamy Gordon forwarded to him an interesting account of the pike and its record, written on the spot by the Rev. George Murray, of Balmaclellan, and

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Mr. Pennell himself states that the width of the fish across the back of the head was nine inches. Instead of being taken with the fly, as Stoddart (also an authority) alleged, the account sent to Mr. Pennell made it clear that the pike, whatever weight it might be, was captured by spinning. Strangely enough, in the last year of the century this very fish was discussed in some of the London papers.

The 96-pounder from a lough near Killaloe was mentioned by a writer now almost forgotten, Mr. William Hughes, a barrister, and author of 'The Practical Angler/ published in

1842 ; and the story is that this pike was so long that it was carried suspended from an oar by two men. That is a suspicious way of putting it; for on two occasions, once in the west and once in the north of Ireland, boatmen described to me gigantic pike which they said they had seen borne home in precisely the same way. It seemed to be a favourite poetical expression—viz. that the pike was so immense that an oar had to be passed through the gills and the beast dangled midway between two bearers shouldering the oar. A 90-lb. pike was also stated in the ' Field' some years ago to have been killed in the Shannon in somewhat the same district as the other, but careful efforts to obtain assured evidence were as disappointing as ever.

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There is no need, however, to labour the point as to these big fish, and we may for the moment return to Lord Inverurie's compilation. Against the year 1797 is set a 40-lb. fish caught in Hertfordshire by a person not known and by a method not stated, but we are informed that a 4-lb. tench was taken out of this pike. The period is too remote. Then we have one of 47-lb. taken two years later from a private lake in

Lincolnshire, the explanation being that a sheet of water was emptied and the fish stranded.

There are plenty of pike in English waters between 20 lb. and 30 lb., but the largest of modern times that were until recently absolutely accepted as authentic were the 37-lb. fish caught by Mr. Jardine in a Buckinghamshire lake, and a slightly larger specimen sent over from Ireland in 1896. In these days an 18-lb. pike is, after all, a very good fish indeed, and anything over 20 lb. should set the fortunate angler, if he values trophies, thinking about the taxidermist. A 34-lb. fish was authenticated from East Anglia in the winter of 1899-1900, and in the * Angler' of March 31, 1900, Mr. A. R. Matthews published a list of the big fish of the season, which included, besides the Norfolk pike, a 33-lb. specimen caught in Lough Mask. Two or three 37-lb. Irish fish were reported in the spring of 1900.

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Mention is also made of a somewhat mysterious 42-lb. dead pike that was left high and dry ashore on the bursting of a lake in Sussex; but here again convincing details have yet to be supplied. It has come to my knowledge in one or two instances that captors of undoubtedly large fish had urgent

reasons for keeping all particulars a secret, and it comes therefore to this, that 40 lb. may be put down as a modern maximum, and that there is no reason why the pike should not attain a much greater size, though questions of age and rates of growth are, as might be expected, matters of surmise rather than positive demonstration. 1

We have, however, kept the pike himself waiting somewhat too long, and may now pass from the realm of legend, fancy, and doubt to that of fact. It would be interesting to know how the Lucius of the ancients acquired the name of ' pike' in England, or when it was first so called. According to Dr. Day, in Anglo-

1 When these pages were printed, and just in time to give me the opportunity of a footnote, the Fishing Gazette announced the receipt, from Ireland, of two large pike: (1) 4o£ lb., length 50 in., girth 27 J in. ; (2) 35 \ lb., of the same length, but 25! in. girth. The larger fish, however, was full of spawn. The weights were verified in London days after the fish had been taken on lines baited with small perch. Details appear in the Fishing Gazette^ May 19, 1900, and the same issue contains correspondence respecting a 53-lb. pike.—W. S.

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Saxon the fish is hacod, and the learned Doctor says that it was first termed a jack in this country, then a pickerel, and then a luce. In Lowland Scotland it is the gedd or gade, in Northumberland gullet, and according to Halliwell a large pike was called morris.

An inquiry of this kind would have great interest for the Rev. J. J. Manley, and he discusses it at some length in his fishing book. Discarding the theory that lucius (from which came the luce of heraldry) was, because of certain phosphorescent properties displayed by the fish in the dark, from luceo to shine, Manley holds to the opinion that lucius was a reference to its character of wolf. As to ' pike,' the authorities differ, and I rather accept Dr. Day's suggestion that it is derived from the Saxon word signifying sharp pointed. Just as sensible would be the French lerocket or lerochetoft, lance or lanceron, and becquet These names, indeed, admirably hit off the form of our fish, with its spit-like shape of body, the darting speed with which it pursues its prey, and the distinctively duck-like termination of the head.

Some people are continually puzzled in their endeavours to fix a boundary between the jack and the pike, but there is none. As has been remarked before, in country districts the word ' jack ' includes

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both great and small, but colloquially a fish under 3 lb. or 4 lb. is called a jack and over that weight a pike. Amongst modern anglers, especially from the towns, the word 'jack* is seldom used, save on Thames-side. Pickerel is seldom heard in conversation, and the baby form of the breed is, as often as not, called pikelet in these days.

Some persons, also, would object to a pike being called a handsome fish, but his vesture in the middle of winter, when he is at his best, is nevertheless richly handsome. It varies in colour from an olive green to a golden brown, and upon this the yellow and white mottlings have a fine ornamental effect of pattern. The white underclothing is also a good setoff against the darker tinting of the sides. These colours vary greatly, however, according to the season and the condition of the fish. Just after spawning the colouring is decidedly sickly, and the gold fades to a dirty white. I have caught old fish that in darting through the water looked the colour of Spanish mahogany, and others that gleamed like old gold.

There is little symmetry in the form of a pike. The depression of the head, the deep setting of the eyes on the top of it, the cruel-looking mouth, with its rows of large teeth and interior serrated in the most terrible way, are repellent, and the body is long

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and narrow, without the graceful curvature that characterises the Salmonidae; the setting back of the dorsal fin to neat the tail, in correspondence exactly with the anal fin, which is abnormally large, is a further point of disfavour. The following technical description I quote by permission of the publisher (Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings) from Day's * British Fishes,' volume 2, page 140:

Length of head 3 \ to 4, of caudal fin 6, height of body 6£ to 7 in the total length. Eyes —situated in about the middle of the length of the head, the diameter of each 7 to 12 times the length of the head, 4 to 6 diameters from the end of the snout, and \\ to 2 apart. The dorsal and abdominal profiles nearly horizontal and parallel, causing the body to be of an almost equal height from the head, to the commencement of the dorsal and anal fins, its head flattened above, while its length is equal to nearly twice that of the height of the body. Cleft of mouth very deep, equalling about half the length of the head ; lower jaw a little the longer. The middle of the upper jaw is slightly emarginate, and receives the head of the vomer ; on either side are the short premaxillaries, which are not nearly so long as the maxilla, which is composed of two pieces, is capable of a considerable amount of motion, and reaches posteriorly to beneath the front edge of the eye. Nostrils large, and nearer the orbit than the end of the snout. Numerous glandular orifices on the head. Teeth —none on the maxillary : large ones and of unequal sizes on the

mandibles ; present on the vomer and pala-

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tines, the inner row of which are the larger, more or less strong and depressible: also fine ones on the tongue. Fins — the dorsal is situated in the last fourth of the total length (excluding the caudal fin), and slightly in advance of the origin of the anal. Pectoral placed low down and below the subopercle. The ventral slightly behind the middle of the total length (excluding the caudal fin). Caudal emarginate or slightly forked. Scales— small, present on the cheeks, upper portions of the opercle, and over the body. Lateral line — nearly straight. Colours —when in the greatest perfection of a green colour, becoming lighter on the sides and beneath ; numerous yellow blotches, spots, or lines along the head and body ; dorsal, anal, and caudal fins of a light ground colour with irregular blotches, spots and bands of dark. When out of season the green becomes of a gray and the yellow markings pale or white.

The voracity of the pike may be accepted without cavil. It is a predatory fish, and of strong and active habits. Nothing comes amiss to it, though we need not believe the old story of an infant child being extracted from a pike's stomach. Most authorities agree that the fish will not refuse a minnow or a frog, nor disdain water-rats, puppies, kittens, weasels,

ducklings, ducks, goslings, dabchicks, coots, and moorhens; and Dr. Day quotes, not disapprovingly, the statement that when emboldened by hunger a pike has been known to attack asses, mules, dogs, horses, and even men.

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That it is a cannibal is also unquestionable. It is quite a common occurrence to catch a pike that bears the marks of seizure and excoriation from a bigger member of the family; and there are well-known instances of two pike being discovered, the one with its head jammed down the throat of the other, and both suffocated. This determined voracity renders the pike a most undesirable tenant of waters that are inhabited by a superior class of fish ; but this subject is treated in a subsequent chapter by a writer who has had long experience in the matter.

It is a question, however, whether the sporting qualities of the fish do not entitle it to more consideration than is given to it, and it is deserving of consideration whether it would not be wise to cultivate certain rivers and lakes as pike preserves. The fish is very prolific. March and April are the usual spawning times ; as the season approaches pairs of pike seek the ditches which discharge into the river, and will work long distances up or down the main stream in search of suitable tributaries. The male is generally smaller than the

female, and the eggs, which are exceedingly small, are dropped among the weeds and leaves of aquatic plants, to which they adhere. The statement that the female turns round and devours the male after spawning may be

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dismissed as a flight of imagination. The ova of a 28-lb. fish that was examined numbered 700,000, and of another fish of exactly the same weight a little under 300,000.

The pike remains a long time out of condition, and should not be caught by sportsmen until July or August. In most public waters the date fixed by the Mundella Act for pike fishing—viz. June 16—is, to say the least, unsportsmanlike.

1 have endeavoured to obtain some decisive information as to the spawning of pike, and learn from Mr. Thomas Ford, of the Manor Fishery, Caistor, that artificial spawning is not impossible or even difficult, but as there is little demand for the fry it is not much practised. According to his observation, the ova show the eye in from twelve to fourteen days and hatch out in from twenty to twenty-four days; and if pike were ever cultivated for the market the fry would be ready for despatch in about ten days after hatching. In Mr. Ford's long experience he has only once been asked to supply the fry of pike.

The fullest answer I received to a question as to the spawning of pike was the following communication from Mr. Wilson H. Armistead, of the Co. Cavan Trout Farm:

I have six or seven lakes here which I am turning

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into trout preserves, and as pike are very numerous it has been important for me to study their habits as much as possible with a view to their destruction- I discovered from observation that when ready to spawn the female pike, often accompanied by two or three males, would run into the weeds in shallow bays, or up ditches and into bog holes. Here they may be seen and approached if the sun be shining brightly ; on a cloudy day they are too wild to let one near, though the gentle swirl on the water will show from where they have moved. While in the shallows I frequently shot them, and more than once got three at a shot The eggs are of a light yellow colour, and do not, as I have been told, adhere to each other, but they separate in the water like trout eggs. The weed they seemed to choose for depositing the eggs was almost invariably Ranunculus aquaiicus. The spawning season last year lasted from February to July. In July I caught a female pike weighing 9 lb. On opening the fish I found a large quantity of ripe spawn and two perch. Without the contents of the stomach and the spawn the fish weighed only

4I lb. As regards the hatching of the ova, this could not be done on grilles unless they were specially made. The best way to collect and hatch the spawn would be as follows : Cover the bottom of a tank with sacking or old net, and on this deposit bunches of Ranunculus aquaiicus^ with soil clinging to the roots to make them sink. The water in the tank should not be more than 2 ft. deep, and with a very gentle stream through—just a trickle. If a male and female pike are placed in the tank and the water kept at about 55 degrees to 60 degrees (this was the temperature in the shallows where the pike were spawning) they will deposit the ova among the weeds. The sacking can then

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be gently lifted out with the weeds on it, and may be deposited in the pond or lake which needs stocking, or, if preferred, the eggs may remain till they hatch, and then the water and young pike may be syphoned off and removed. May I add one more word? I would not advise the stocking of any water with pike. I have unfortunately been enabled to realise by experience what a terrible brute he is, and how easily stocking one's water with pike may lead to them getting into other waters where they are not wanted. They may be killed down, but cannot be exterminated.

The question is suggested on a previous page why in these

days, when angling is regarded so much as a sport, and opportunities of general fishing become rarer every year, it would not answer to maintain pike preserves ? How easily water may be stocked with pike was charmingly told by the Rev. Harry Jones in his ' Holiday Papers.' He and his young brother were acquainted with a small deep pond full of tiny perch, which, as is generally the case in such waters, never reached any size. The boys thought they could improve upon this state of affairs, and, from the dykes which stretched right and left over the fen near the old house, snared the pike which came up to spawn, and took them to the mere. Wise in their youth, they dragged a farmhouse moat, and were able to place some two hundred carp in the little mere as food for the pike. The result was most successful,

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and in course of time, the mere being left alone for four years, the first attempt was made at angling for pike; a fish of 5 lb. was soon landed, others were caught, and it was discovered that the water simply swarmed with pike. The perch also had improved in size and numbers, and what was virtually a piece of waste water became a most desirable angling preserve.

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AN AWKWARD PLACE

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CHAPTER III

PIKE FISHING IN LAKES

It will have been noticed in previous chapters that the stories, true and false, of monster pike have been almost entirely connected with lakes, and there can be no doubt that fish of exceptional size must be found in such sheets of water, great and small, at least in England and Ireland. Ireland is especially rich in lakes which, by comparison with our English waters, may be accounted inland seas. On Derg, Corrib, or Mask, it is easy to be wrecked in your yacht, and the winds and waves are often too much for the boldest fishermen. In our general view of pike fishing in lakes these expanses of water may therefore be dismissed with but a passing reference. It is in the sheltered bays and upon the weedy shallows of the Irish loughs that pike fishing is in the main to be enjoyed successfully. At the same time it may be remarked that the pike-yielding qualities of

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these waters have never yet been—to use a word much in vogue—exploited, as they might be, pertinaciously, with equipment specially fitted for them, and a scientific and systematic management of the sport.

Around most of the stately homes of England are the lovely estates which, preserved with little alteration for hundreds of years, present glorious park scenery the like of which cannot be found in any other part of the world, and to these the traveller, wherever he may roam, turns affectionate memories, longing always to return to them. Woods are there, and, as a contrast, will generally be found a sheet of water, varying from the rank of a pond to areas of hundreds of acres in extent. No one has ever yet written a book dealing exclusively with these adornments to British scenery. They are often unknown beyond a circumscribed neighbourhood. The angler, however, knows them well, and wherever their virtues are discovered no little part of the duty of the land agent is the granting or refusing permission to fish.

In addition to these strictly private waters are others of a more public character. The best known, perhaps, are the famous Broads of East Anglia. Time was when these were available without much trouble to the visiting angler, but one of the results

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of the popularisation of the sport, with a perhaps necessary if not defiant interference with private rights, has been the gradual closing of many pike-haunted lagoons. The East Anglian Broads represent the least beautiful, from a scenic standpoint, of the English lakes—if lakes, indeed, they may be called when they are mostly connected by water lanes right away to the sea. Dutch-like entirely are the landscapes, though some of the smaller Broads are delightfully environed by woods, and all of them are beautified by their forests of reeds, which wave like the green banners of a great host in the summer, and rustle in acreage of khaki spears during the winter. They are the homes of countless water-fowl and the immemorial abode of pike, with an abundant supply of coarse fish to keep the breed in vigour.

Then there are the meres of Cheshire and Shropshire, not so well known as the Broads to the town angler and tourist, but tested often by local sportsmen ; and there is a noted mere in Yorkshire (Hornsea), which is fished regularly by a limited company of rods, and is perhaps one of the best pike preserves in the country. In Devonshire are Slapton and Torcross Leys, both abounding with pike.

It is my purpose in this chapter, however, rather to recall typical angling in pike lakes which it has

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been my privilege and pleasure to fish, and this I do with the prefatory announcement that in subsequent chapters the technicalities of the various methods of pike fishing will be dealt with by the competent pen of my friend John Bickerdyke. It must at the same time happen that passing hints as to spinning and live baiting will necessarily be evoked as legitimate to narrative. The reader will scarcely require to be informed that pike are caught by live baits, or the use of dead fish or artificial imitations, and that the general baits for pike are (i) small living Cyprinidae swimming as freely as a captive attached to a hook and line can in a confined circle ; (2) fish of the same moderate dimensions, dead, and armed with hooks and swivels that will enable them to be worked in imitation more or less of a live fish progressing through the water; and (3) artificial baits in numberless devices and many materials in imitation of the same.

There are times, however, in the season when pike will take with tolerable certainty what is nominally called a fly. Even in trout fishing there are some constructions of fur, feather, and tinsel which the purist will not allow under any consideration to rank as an artificial fly, and if misnomer

there be in this matter, it attains its maximum degree in some of the

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so-called ' pike flies/ The subject is mentioned at this point because the pike fly is principally adapted to lakes during the summer and early autumn. It may serve at other times, but as the fish after the dying down of the weeds make for the deep water if there is any to be found, something more substantial, introduced nearer the bottom than a fly can be easily worked, is required. If you walk along the margin of one of the aforesaid lakes during July or August, and proceed warily with shadow behind, you will by patient watching soon espy a pike lying amongst, or often over, the rich water-plant coppices. The mottled coating of the pike is sa like the surrounding growths that you will not, till the eye is accustomed, easily realise the fact that a fish is there. This will be especially the case when the natural covert consists of the anacharis weed, so disastrously introduced from America to choke up half the lakes of the country. It is only when there is a sudden disturbance on the surface of the water, and perhaps a discoloration as the surprised fish darts towards the middle of the lake, that you are apprised of the whereabouts of a basking pike.

Now is the time to use the pike fly. Sportsmanlike sport with

pike of 4 lb., 5 lb., and perhaps of larger size may be obtained by casting 3-inch salmon hooks

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dressed full with gaudy feathers, in which white and red predominate with bold bands of silver or gold tinsel down the long body. Such flies may be sent forth with an ordinary salmon rod and tackle. There is no necessity in these hard times, when good hanks are so expensive, to use single gut, though in bright weather, when the water is clear, it should never be forgotten that, even in angling for pike, to fish fine and far off remains a golden rule. The fly should be made, if possible, to alight between banks of weed, and whenever there is a semblance of clearing it should be worked briskly, even rather violently. The experience of Irish and Scotch rivers, where pike are often hooked by salmon fishers, teaches us that weeds are not altogether a necessity. It is sometimes said in a spirit of scorn that the pike is a poor fish for sport. By comparison with the salmon it may be so; yet if you can manage to do battle on a single-hook salmon fly with a pike of reasonable size you will admit that his lighting powers are not to be despised.

Such a fly as that which I have just indicated is of course understood to be taken by the pike for a minnow, gudgeon, or other small fish; but there are baits, like humming-birds,

which are built up on a knowledge of its omnivorous tastes. It is all in the nature of things, therefore, to produce imitations of

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the small fowl and minor four-legged rodents which the pike is known to devour when the appetite is sharp and the opportunity favourable. These, like all other pike lures, should have a short length of gimp looped to the casting line in remembrance of the strong long teeth. One of the most successful practitioners with this sort of bait for pike used to fish in a wild pond, where pike were plentiful, but of somewhat peculiar habits and degenerate quality. With the more conventional usages of fishing he seldom succeeded, but with constructions which, for want of a better word, we may term pike flies, he achieved the deserved reputation of being the master pike fisher of the district.

My young friend made his own pike flies, and they ranged from the size of, say, a wren, to an object eight inches long. It was in point of detail a cylindrical piece of cork, 3^ in. long by \ in. diameter, furnished at the head with a fairly stout

metal fan to ensure spinning; the body was concealed by a wrapping of red and yellow wool, spirally fastened tightly by a narrow brass band. An immense double hook protruded from the tapered end of the cork, and there were in addition, flying loose, a pair of treble triangles. Behind the big hooks trailed a 4-in. plume of the most showy part of a peacock's feather. As this so-

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called fly weighed three-quarters of an ounce it required a specially stiff rod, and the casting, of course, was necessarily underhanded. The angler was most dexterous ; he could get out his thirty yards with ease, and it was surprising to see how the pike, which ought to have been frightened out of their wits by such a monstrosity dragged willy nilly through the water, sprang like bulldogs to the assault. In Ireland a pike fly is made of the terminal whisk of a calf's tail in representation of a water rat.

It is in the autumn and the open weather of the winter that the more common methods of pike fishing in lakes are generally pursued. Should the banks of a lake admit of fishing from shore, you have a splendid recreation amidst the most delightful surroundings. The sward of an old park allows even the novice to fish on the easiest of terms; he is not vexed with frequent entanglements, and behind and before it

is a clear field and no favour. The boat, however, is a primary necessity on the majority of lakes, and he must be indeed hard to please who does not find the longest day too short. The waters of our English parks having been maintained as ornamental features of the estate, there is always something to please the observant eye. Sometimes there are mouldy ruins hidden under

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a wealth of ancestral ivy; sometimes the noble forest trees have their umbrageous foliage mirrored in the surface, lending a succession of shifting hues to the water as the sun progresses on its daily journey. Yonder is an ancient rookery, under which, before the delicate May leaflets have broadened to maturity, the farmers and tradesmen around have their annual rook-shooting festival; the jackdaws and the bats which circle around you at eventide make their home in the ruins or in the church belfry, and across, on the other side of the lake, is the smooth upland with the mansion fair and square, flanked by ministering shrubberies, in the distance. There are hundreds of such beautiful domains, and to one of these let me conduct the reader upon a winter day which does not quite answer to the softly blowing wind and dark lowering weather which Dame Juliana Barnes considered the correct conditions for angling. There is a great deal of spurious dogmatism talked about the weather in

fishing, yet there are some rules which it would be wise to treat with respect. Thus in pike fishing on a lake the thing to be least desired is a surface unruffled by the wind. It is not always the case that pike refuse to. run when the wind is in the north or east, nor that they are bold and dashing when it is south and west;

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but if one could order one's own meteorological conditions, it should be for a stiff steady breeze from the west, with whatever variations it might decide to take either north or south.

TYPICAL WATERS AND ODD DAYS

Let me give an example of an exception that proves the rule. The morning of our excursion was deadly still. A white mist, which was almost fog, brooded over the fields, dimming the views down the glades of the forest through which we drove, past oak trees that had been standing sturdy for centuries. It was apparently a most unpromising day, but we were too accustomed to the uncertainties of our British climate to be downhearted at any preliminary prospect We might feel disappointed at the glass-like surface of the great lake which met our view, what time the keeper greeted us with bait-can and motioned us to where the boat was ready for our

reception. The sun, for which we so often long in vain when it is wanted, began to smile, and, though it was winter by the calendar, it was summer in mildness. But in fishing you must be always equal to emergencies and prepared to adapt your actions to the circumstances of the hour.

Our favourite method for pike is spinning, and one of us as a matter of fact was not equipped with

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tackle for the live -baiting now forced upon us as a necessity. To cast a spinning bait out upon a burnished surface like this in clear water would have been ridiculous; there was nothing for it but to set up our live-baiting snap tackle and make the best of the twisted traces, instead of the single salmon gut which best suits such work. The outlook was so bad that we were quite prepared, to return to shore without a fish. It was not reasonable to expect sport. Yet the unexpected happened.

Spite of the utter absence of wind, the pike were briskly moving for two hours; spite of the warm sunshine and absence of even a zephyr's ghost, the sport was as inspiriting as I have ever seen it. Without loss of time I cast out about twenty yards from the boat, laid my rod upon the thwart while I turned round to chat with my friend who had

ensconced himself at the stern end, and then proceeded leisurely to fill my pipe. But I had to break off in the act, for the float, after a quick twitch, sank slowly under. I could see its white head about three inches beneath the surface, and as it remained stationary I hesitated to strike. A couple of minutes at least passed ; then I pulled gently on the line and struck, with the result that a 9-lb. fish, in the most perfect form and condition, was soon brought

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alongside the boat, secured, and relegated to the well. One of the rules on the lake was that only three fish were to be carried away ; another that all under 5 lb. were to be returned to the water.

Throwing out a second bait, I just contrived to fill that pipe, but had no time to fasten up the pouch before down went the float again, quietly as before. Presently it began to slide off in a slanting direction ; this time it was a 5-lb. fish that came to net. It is very hard to know what to do under such rules as those which controlled us. When there is no well in the boat you have to decide at the moment about retaining or returning your fish. It is an anxious crisis; you may never get another, or quite towards the close of the day you may find something very heavy to make up your leash. It is rather a relief, therefore, in one sense, when there is no room left for doubt;

back consequently went the 5-pounder. Number three fish was still smaller—with summary jurisdiction. The fourth bait had not been out five minutes before it disappeared a little more briskly than had happened before, the marauder being a pike of 7 lb. which played on a tight line in a most diverting way, appearing all the time to be standing on his head, and viciously biting at the bottom as he darted hither and thither.

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The water, let me remark, was stf clear that one of the entertainments of the day was watching the playing of the hooked fish quite a yard deep. The fifth pike was exactly the same weight as its predecessor, and was the only one that darted off with the determined rush which the angler so much appreciates. That, too, I returned. The sixth was a trifle of 3 lb., which had been badly handled by a bigger fish, if one might judge from the deep half-healed scars across the shoulders. It must be remembered that this was pike fishing in sunshine and a glassy surface. The seventh fish interrupted me as before in the filling of a pipe, and a very pleasant interruption it was, though the pike was not much over 7 lb. Matters were not, however, quite satisfactory. I consulted Vith my friend, who had meanwhile been engaged with fish on his own account at the stern ; the keeper was kept pretty busy between us, and the well was becoming overcrowded.

We nourished hope and belief that we were bound to get something * in the teens' before night; and, as it was only turned noon, this respectable fish also was put back.

Out went the eighth bait, and I had just completed the little operation previously interrupted when the float sharply bob-bobbed, and disappeared in the gingerly fashion of yore. * Ah ! you are a little

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beggar,' I said, 'and you may have your will. I will light my pipe this time, at any rate, and not be baffled any more.' The float quietly swam about, with the upper part well out of the water, sometimes just dipping under, then popping up, then gliding off, but never taking out a foot of line. All the previous fish, however, had taken the bait fairly, and I had no doubt, considering the unusual law I was giving him, that my gentleman would be eventually hooked. At length I struck decisively, and we noticed when the fighting fish was a couple of yards from the boat that he still had the bait, which was a fairly big roach, across his jaws, but seized, against all custom, not far from the tail. This looked like a sample of about 10 lb. Another amusement of the day was weighing the fish as soon as the hooks were cleared, and hearing the splashing of those retained in the well when a newcomer was added; but we were to have no amusement now. As I

brought the pike slowly in he opened his wide mouth, threw up his broad tail, and vanished, having never touched the hooks; he had simply held on grimly to the, by this time, terribly mauled bait. There was no use crying after lost Esox, which escaped with a triumphant flourish. Number nine bait brought in a 5-pounder. My friend H., unknown to me, had been for several

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minutes playing a fish some distance from the stern, and by the time the keeper had weighed and returned my ninth he was ready to assist him. Up to this time H. had caught three fish, and I was sincerely glad to know that the game was large enough to at last warrant the use of the gaff for what was a grand specimen of a 15-lb. pike. I accounted for other fish of 5 lb. and 2 lb., released of course to keep the rest company, before we went ashore for lunch, returning soon to realise that the smart fun was at an end. Still, we went on catching now and then, and, the sunshine having disappeared and a mist stealing over everything, we realised that the hoped-for wind was evidently not to be that day. Sincerely did I deplore the putting back of those three 7-pounders, for it was now quite on the cards that I should not have an honest leash to keep.

The first fish caught in the afternoon weighed 5 lb., the next 4

lb., and, the remaining time speeding fast away, I kept the fourteenth, which was a little over 6 lb., and eventually, as numbers fifteen and sixteen were only of 3 lb. and 2 lb. respectively, I had the amusement of reflecting that I had actually landed (or boated) fifteen fish, weighing 73 lb., yet had basketed one short of the prescribed allowance.

My persevering and skilful comrade continued his

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fortune with the heavy weights to the end. We had both of us now made up our minds that really remunerative business was over, and I retired on my profits, but advised my friend to try a spinning bait and at least work his way home to shore. He was fishing with the old-fashioned Storr spinning flight, which consists of one extra large triangle placed by passing the gimp with a baiting needle through the vent and out of the mouth. It had only one offer, but the fish had fastened well, and to make the story short he had secured the prize of the day in the shape of a remarkably handsome 18-lb. pike. His score for the day (for we note-booked the fish as we took them) was 5 lb., 7 lb., 15 lb., 6 lb., 5 lb., 4 lb., 3 lb., and 18 lb.—eight fish weighing 63 lb.

The next day was, according to the canons, a much more favourable day for pike. There was no sun, there was a faint

wind from the south-east, and, though it died away at times, there was quite sufficient ripple to ruffle some portions of the lake. In truth I should have called it a model day for winter pike fishing—favourable for the running of fish, and most agreeable for the angler sitting in a boat. Two unfavourable auguries, however, struck us at the beginning. The keeper reported that the hundreds of baits upon which he had been relying in the store

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box at the other end of the lake had, through the rottenness of the bottom boards, escaped; and we had only about fifteen to carry us through the day.

We rowed off to untried ground, cast out our anchor, and resolved to be exceedingly careful with the baits. My very first cast, nevertheless, sent the roach hurtling unattached through the air, and there was one precious bait lost My pike of the previous day had been caught on one Jardine snap which had done service before, and this I now replaced with new tackle. My float was in action a few minutes when it was taken under in a finicking sort of way, came smartly up again, and behaved in such a delusive manner that I determined—baits being a serious consideration—not to be in a hurry. The result was the securing of a 6-lb. pike, and this, especially remembering the previous experience, I

resolved to keep for the sake of luck, rescue or no rescue.

There is no need to go through the details of that second day's indifferent fishing* The pike were taking just as badly as they had been taking gallantly on the previous day, and as we had a number of futile runs with our live baits we agreed to spin, our hope being that the fish would come on in earnest in the afternoon, when the remaining live bait would be wanted. My friend happened to have three spoons with him. I

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tried a golden one, with no effect; then selected a smaller size, silvered on one side, coppered in the concave. It was probable that nothing but small fish would come to this, and so for a time it befell, the pike successively returned being of 3 lb., i^lb., and 3^ lb., taken at much $00 long intervals to satisfy anyone just before luncheon.

We had a bit of diversion in listening to the hounds, the cheery cries of the huntsmen, and the music of the horn in a wood a little ahead of our anchorage. There being a deliciously green interval of upland between the further wood and that opposite us, J kept a sharp look-out if haply the fox came that way. The field soon seemed, however, to be receding; the cheery clamour of the hunt grew fainter and fainter, and by-and-by we heard the horses, like charging

cavalry, clattering over a distant bridge, doubtless in pursuit of another fox to whose scent the hounds had been diverted. We were discussing this probability when out of the wood in which the hounds had been working ten minutes earlier came the hunted, draggle-tailed fox in person. Jhe poor refugee had evidently had a hard time of it, for he cantered—ah ! so wearily—across the sward, not noticing the rabbits which scampered right and left as he advanced, and disappeared, with

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his brush nicely saved for the present, in the other section of the wood.

We spared little time for luncheon, and, mooring in the deepest water, my friend tried a live bait, while I cast around with the bright one-inch spoon. Presently I was playing a well-hooked fish of 9 lb., which I need not say was, without demur, knocked on the head and placed in the basket with number one. Both of us now sat steadily down to profitless live baiting. The familiar dallying with my float began after a while, and I called attention to the movement, remarking, as I already had done many times that day and the day before, 'how like perch-bites these runs of pike are.' We had by this time fallen out of the usual custom in live baiting for pike, and, instead of striking when the fish had gone off a yard or so, had acted upon the principle of giving excessive time. For full five minutes the float was kept barely under water, and scarcely any line was taken out. There was no sense, nevertheless, in letting the fish fool with the bait for ever, and I hooked my fish, a noble perch of 3J lb., which had taken a fair-sized roach and was excellently hooked in the upper lip. Within about an hour of dusk all our live baits were gone, but we had upon the floor of the punt some half-

dozen battered roach corpses that

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had done duty alive, and were therefore pretty well denuded of scales.

We thereupon affixed the Storr flights, and after working in vain for half an hour each caught a 7-lb. fish. Presently I had one of 3 lb., and about half an hour later, almost at the last throw, my friend brought to boat one of 4^1b. Even so we had not done badly, my entry standing at seven fish weighing 29 lb. (including the perch, which confronts me in a case, a perfect model of Perca fluviatilis). The other rod had also accounted for seven fish weighing 30^ lb., his score being, beside the two which I have specified, pike of 5 lb., 4 lb., 5 lb., 5 lb., 5 lb. In the two short days of five hours each we had between us accounted for 2oo\ lb. of pike, though, through the irony of fate, on the first day out of my fifteen I retained but two, and should have had no more on the second day but for the perch. My friend, who had been throughout getting the bigger fish, on the second day had a solitary pike in his basket to travel to town in the very respectable company of the specimens of 15 lb. and 18 lb. And this story of pike fishing is told as a fair illustration of the sport that is

furnished in these typical lakes of our English parks.

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CHAPTER IV

SMALL WATERS AND TYPICAL DAYS

A direct contrast to the lake described in the previous chapter was a narrow lagoon, which probably was once an arm of the German Ocean and is now a freshwater pool, guarded by a dense wall of the tallest reeds ; besides stores of roach and tench, it breeds quantities of somewhat small pike, and no one seems to have heard of anything larger than 12 lb. ever being taken in angling. A parson from a neighbouring town had on the week of my visit, as I was informed, caught twenty-five fish, none larger than 9 lb., and there seemed little chance of sport until there had been a longer interval between the fishings. There was no possibility of operating over the lofty reeds, and the boat on such narrow water would have a very disturbing effect. The deepest part of the pool, at the upper end nearest the sea, was not more than ten feet, and the average would be considerably less.

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In fishing a water of this kind you have in a very special degree to adapt yourself to all circumstances ; and in remembrance of the recent clerical disturbance the thing to do was to set up the lightest form of all pike tackle—viz. the paternoster, a salmon-gut trace with a i-oz. lead at the end, and a single hook on gimp depending from the trace, a foot or so from the sinker. The bait for this should be small, and it was imperative to creep along the extreme edge of the reeds, avoiding splashes and making no fuss in dropping in the bait. In no part was this water more than thirty yards wide, so that hard casting was not required. It was something on a day like this to wind up with a dozen pike, and if they weighed but 60 lb. total, they were of very uniform pattern (5 lb. average), the one exception being an 8-pounder, which the foolish lad who rowed the boat smote bodily off the hook in netting.

This is recalled as the most modest form of pike angling, but it was as good as the best, because it was the opportunity of wetting the line at the beginning of the winter season. Every pike fisher will understand what I mean. That first day is keenly appreciated. There is something of sentiment, of course, in certain incidents of even the most practical sportsman's career. The hunting man fondly handling his buck-

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skins overnight in readiness for the opening meet; the shooting man sorting out cartridges on the eve of the Twelfth or the First, will certainly comprehend me. It is true that the angler is in a measure always in season. Beginning with salmon and trout, he can ring the changes on grayling, pike, perch, and other coarse fish till Valentine's Day comes round again, and so in a way have a relay of Firsts.

It is on a day like this that lessons are learned. In preparing for it you will find out if the line had not been dried before it was last used, and so through every item of tackle. As the rod is removed from the bag, the winch from its case, and the boxes of tackle are opened, testimony is borne either to the angler's care or neglect, and it is thus that the fisherman in time learns that one of the most important duties he has to perform is at all times and seasons to see that his tackle, to the minutest item, is kept in order.

For many years it was my custom to wet the pike-line somewhere about Michaelmas, and one of my remembrances of such a time was on a lake of some seventy acres, not far from the spot where John Hampden, riding over the Chilterns with his fatal wound, ended a patriot's career. There had been a white frost that rendered fishing hopeless until the

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early afternoon. All the morning the sere leaves were lightly shed upon the water in fluttering hosts, loosened by the frosts of the night. The sun, however, licked up the white from the grass, and a gentle breeze in the afternoon enabled us to take to the spinning tackle.

Round and across the venerable keeper ploddingly pulled the boat with, until the sun was reddening towards the west, only a 3-ib. fish hooked and returned. To me then was bestowed a dull but heavy strike and a leisurely movement of an unseen object in the lake. It was one of those laggardly, spiritless runs which leaves one for a moment in doubt whether it is a fish or a log that is on the hook. There was no pretence of rushing or fighting, only an occasional indication that whatever was in attachment was shaking its head with surprise and resentment. The weight became heavier, too, as time went on, and this added somewhat to the pleasure ; for it was clear now that it was a fish, and that it was gradually gathering dead-weight from the decaying weeds through which it ploughed.

In consequence of this unresisting obstruction an hour and more elapsed before I could bring the thing to the surface. As both the keeper and myself had forecast during the proceedings, all we saw at

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first was a mass of brown glistening rotten vegetation. This had to be cleared away in great wisps with the hand, whereupon the pike, being free from swaddling clothes, made a brisker effort. However, he was pretty well exhausted, the weeds having wrapped him well around the head, stuffed his mouth, and probably plugged his eyes.

He was brought to book at last, though I had to lay the rod down in the boat and perform the gaffing myself. It was a pike of 19J lb., and the notable point of the capture was that the fish had been hooked foul with one branch of the triangle in the pectoral fin. That is why I have the head preserved among the few settings-up I have allowed myself during long years of fishing.

The most disappointing excursion I ever made for pike was to the Friesland meres. In many respects it was an interesting expedition, but most unsatisfactory to an angler. In the absence of definite information, I had reasoned myself into the conclusion that a series of lakes which were exactly like the Norfolk Broads must be the best of pike water; as a fact, more pikey-looking water could not be wished. It was very nice, of course, to have the charter of a comfortable Loynes yacht, and to cruise for

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a fortnight fishing, now for roach, now for perch, and now for pike.

The scenery, to be sure, like that of East Anglia, was a little monotonous. Every day you looked from the deck upon a wonderful breadth of sky, the country being so flat; upon pastures as far as the eye could reach 'dressed in living green* {vide Isaac Watts, D.D.); upon black and white cattle tamely grazing, upon steeply pitched farm roofs of ruddy tiles, upon belts of formal poplars; upon countless windmills, upon neat homes and homely churches, and upon a frequent shimmer of water on the horizon line. These meres are connected by canals that resemble rivers, with their picturesque margin of rushes and aquatic flowers, and no tow paths.

Fishing from our little dingey on many days I caught a few pike that were very small, sadly understanding the reason on acquaintance with the manner in which the meres are ruthlessly fished for commercial objects. Instead of the best pike fishing in the world, these waters give you the worst. The fish are never left alone, and in whatever place you may be cruising you will meet heavy sailing boats inhabited by men who get their living by netting and wild-fowling. It is, in fact, one of the recognised industries

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of the province. The fishermen purchase their rights, and in truth they generously live up to them. Their clumsy craft, sometimes as large as a Norfolk wherry, are furnished with roomy wells, and the nets are worked night and day. The men anchor close to the reeds, and from this centre an immense seine net is swept around the neighbourhood. That there are pike left was evident from the two or three hauls I myself watched of thirty or forty fish, averaging perhaps 3 lb. I saw nothing larger than 5 lb., but noted numbers of poor half-pounders thrown into the tank. Our principal object was to avoid these fishing boats, which, anchoring in one place, cleaned it out and then moved on to another. Every mere, therefore, and the whole mere, is systematically fished, so that if any pike elude the meshes they are so harassed and worried that the angler has little chance.

PIKE FISHING IN WINTER

In a company of anglers, leisurely smoking in the warmth of a well-lighted room—or, better still perhaps, spiking their trout-rods during the impossible hours of a pleasant bright summer day, and lolling under the shade of a spreading chestnut, recalling the while in dog-day heat experiences of winter fishing—should

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there be an experienced pike fisher in the group, the conversation will seldom proceed far without some reference to ' the ice freezing in the rings/ That is a very fascinating thing to talk about by your study fire, and it often happens; the occurrence gives a touch of adventure to your fishing, making you feel that you are a worthy descendant of the hardy Norseman when you venture afield with your pike rod to fish through a short winter day.

In stories for the Christmas numbers the sportsman frequently manages to have some pressing occasion for shooting or hooking something on Christmas Eve, and no doubt the fiction is not infrequently founded on fact. It is not so many years ago since, having myself written a Christmas story of this character, I determined to do the thing in real life; and as Christmas Eve fell on Saturday, I had a free day for the purpose. It was one of those bracing, frosty mornings over which many people wax sentimental, and when perhaps we all see an extra red in the holly berries and a deeper green in its glossy leaves.

There was at my disposal a nice little lake on the estate of a friend within an hour's run of London by train. Thick boots, gaiters, extra warm knickerbockers, and an ulster barely kept one warm on the drive to the railway station, and the young man who was waiting

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with my friend's boat when I arrived at the bottom of the lawn about half-past eleven would have made a passable study for a frozen-out gardener. The sun, to be sure, was shining clearly out of a sky of Italian blue, without, however, blunting the cutting edge of the eager and nipping air, due not more to the frost than to a shrewd north-east wind which blew straight down the lake. There was a silence most impressive. It would be agreeable to write, if not of blackbirds and thrushes, at least about robins and their sweet pleading little pipe in the bushes; but as a matter of fact, save that the breeze rustled amongst the leaves of the shrubbery, the voice of Nature was hushed, and the silence was accentuated by the ring of the woodman's axe and the occasional hoarse indication of a passing train in the distance.

There is no time under such circumstances, however, for sentimentalising. You get aboard your boat with all speed, push out into the lake, and gain what warmth you may in spinning. It must be very cold indeed if the exertion of this form of sport does not bring you to a glow of oblivion as to the elements. I know of nothing that makes the blood circulate, nor of any out-of-door exercise that exhilarates the frame, more than spinning a piece of water under such conditions. This 24th of December was in truth the

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beginning of a spell truthfully admitted to be ' something like a winter;' the fingers rapidly became numbed, and even the toes in the straw strewing the bottom boards of the boat literally ached with the cold. The young man with the oars, although used to open-air toil, was becoming frozen, and seemed to be shrinking up within himself in proportion as the tip of his nose grew bluer and bluer. 1 must nevertheless confess that shortly after noon, when the sun was shining clear without strength, I was astonished to notice a formation of ice underneath each ring of the pike rod, and the line as it came through my hands felt more like wire than it had ever done before. It became distinctly hard during the almost imperceptible interval between the seconds when it left the water and was worked in to be coiled at my feet. In less than a quarter of an hour it was necessary to stop proceedings though the rings were, as all pike-rod rings should be, of the largest, little less than half an inch in diameter ; yet they were now solidly blocked with white ice 3 and I had to stop for the simple reason that the jammed line declined any longer the conjtest with icicles. As may be supposed, the fingers had now become so cold that they had lost all feeling except an abiding hint of pain, which induced a maximum of clumsiness in dealing with obstructions. The ice in the five rings

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had at length to be smashed up bodily by a somewhat heavy sporting knife.

The young man seized the opportunity to put his oars inboard for a moment, beat himself feebly, and blow upon his fingers for warmth. Being anxious, however, to boast once and for ever that I had actually caught a pike on Christmas Eve, I recommenced spinning with new zeal after each clearance of ice. At the third cast I was fortunate enough, having spun half across the lake, to hook, gaff, and lift aboard a fish of about 4 lb. There were many larger pike in the water, and during the winter of 1899 one patriarchal and original inhabitant of 261b. was caught there. My winter fish was large enough for honour, quite sufficient for the fish-kettle of .a certain dame who likes to have a boiled pike dished up with parsley sauce when she can get one, and would serve if ever he wrote another Christmas story to ease an author's conscience in stating that he had actually killed a Christmas pike.

This something attempted something done had earned a little cold repose, and as the sun continued to persevere in making himself felt, I surmised that there might be a temporary cessation of frost; here, moreover, was our opportunity for

going ashore and

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shivering in the summer-house by the landing stage over the basket filled with something hidden under fair white linen. It was a miserable repast, nevertheless, and the benumbed angler and his wretched-looking attendant turned up the collars of their overcoats, shut the door, and made believe to enjoy the cold pheasant and etceteras. It was a hasty luncheon, and we were glad to return to the boat. I had not begun spinning again without observing that the frost, instead of relaxing, was becoming keener. The rings were frozen instantly, the drippings from the line fell frozen, making such an icefloe in the boat that we had to land, beat out loose gravel from the walks, and sprinkle it about in order to secure steady foothold.

Indeed, fishing was impossible. The line came in stiffer and stiffer, and as almost every cast in a portion of the lake which we now tried brought back fragments of weed on the triangles, it was agonising work incessantly to free the bait. The very tackle and bait at last froze between the casts, and by two o'clock, which is precisely the time the pike angler should be laying himself out for final hours of best chances, the cold was so masterful, and the impossibility of getting the line to glide freely through the icebound rings so

pronounced, that a retreat was beaten.

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The young man received the order to go home with a delight which his chattering teeth could not conceal. It took him some minutes to pull to land, and during the transit I satisfied myself that, spite of these Arctic phenomena, there was then no appearance of ice even on the edge of the lake. This might be accounted for by the sun and breeze, but the frost was doing its business surely; during our brief voyage landwards the dace to which the triangles were fixed became as rigid as a piece of wood ; it rebounded when thrown upon the ground, and everything else had become hardened in proportion. The last glimpse of the quiet water near the bank was of seeming needles sprinkled on the surface, and it was a skim of ice when the packing up was finished/

The experience of jack fishing when water is frozen varies considerably. Very different in its character was the adventure of myself and the headmaster of one of our grammar schools on a certain Twelfth Day, a day of erratic fog after a week of muggy mildness, and a green Christmas with south-westerly winds. The night before our expedition a change was heralded by a huge globe of orange-coloured flame sinking in the west, and a suspicious brightness about the stars overhead. When,.next morning,

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I threw back the curtains a little before daylight, I was saved the trouble of looking out upon the lawn, as the panes had become traceried during the night. On our drive to the water discussion as to the weather was rendered unnecessary, for a whiter frost with a more liberal supply of snow-like hoar could not be wished than that which greeted us during our ride of eleven miles behind a pair of smart ponies, who spurned the hard roads. The branches of the trees were pure coral, the waysides and the meadows were dressed in natural powder, and the puddles of the previous day were hard ice.

One makes very merry, nevertheless, in warm clothing during a smart spin over the roads in honest wintry weather, even in the cool of the morning. The spirits of the men in the carriage, like those of the horses before them, rose like mercury. Our fishing ground on this particular occasion was a long serpentine mere, something over a mile in length and at its widest sixty yards broad. In the summer and autumn it is so densely fringed with bulrushes that no angler can get near except at the appointed clearings, but although the tall thickets were still there, they were of bare stems and not of feathery foliage. Nature had, in point of fact, considerably thinned out this protection against poachers.

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We had been remarking to one another upon the stray patches of furze bloom that lingered bright on the common, and upon the chrysanthemums which, in the cottage garden plots, no frost had yet disturbed. The idea that in the course of one night the water would be frozen had not occurred to us, but an advance glimpse of the lower portion, where it was very shallow, revealed unmistakable ice. Reining up near the boat-house, we for the first time had an uninterrupted view of the mere from end to end, and were obliged to face the uncomfortable truth that the water was completely frozen. Wherefore, it was with a somewhat derisive expression of countenance that the coachman took from under his feet the live bait can containing five dozen Thames bait. After all it might be, in the absence of wind, but a thin coat of ice, and without delay we made an attempt to force the boat through and smash up a pathway; for, as so often happens, the white frost was followed by an early and frank sunshine.

We effectually broke the ice on either side with the oars, but the water being here not two feet deep we could make but little progress. What pike there were would assuredly be in the deeper water further up; the prospect was deterring, and after holding a council of war, we dolorously confessed that the boat,

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without which the mere could not be fished effectually, was out of the question. We therefore padlocked it again in the boat-house. By the aid of a steam launch we might have cut our way through, but the game anyhow was not worth the candle, especially as the noise of breaking the ice and crashing along would have frightened the pike-for the whole day. The sun at any rate enabled us to throw off our mufflers and overcoats, and up we tramped along the reedy margin to reconnoitre, in the hope of finding a corner of open water. After a walk of some third of a mile we, forlorn chance though it had been, discovered an unfrozen area of perhaps forty yards long by five or six yards wide. When the white on the grass which was now rapidly melting had been quite obliterated there might be an off chance of a fish even here; we could both recall sport along the edges of ice under similar circumstances.

It would have seemed more encouraging, however, had this confined space of water not been so deadly calm ; but being there with such a store of baits, and inspired by the angler's undying hope and enthusiasm, we rigged up our Bickerdyke snap tackle with float, and let the live baits work their will. My friend's had hardly touched the water when it was seized

by a pike, which, after a little trifling, left it quite uninjured,

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He put on another bait, and we watched our floats frisking about in this small haven at discretion. Then we walked off prospecting, with the result that we happened upon a second bit of open water longer and broader than the other, but much more difficult as a point of operation. A tangled margin of rushy marsh had to be cautiously crossed, and then came a hard ridge of bank bordered with chevaux de frise of stubborn reed mace.

It being possible to get out the line from this awkward base by the exercise of much patience and a temper not to be angered by the inevitable entanglements that must happen with the artful growths in the midst of which we stood, we marked the situation, concocted a plan of campaign, and returned to the old spot to find the floats just as we left them, with the difference that they were quite stationary, signifying of course that the baits had been killed by the cold water. The little fishes in the can which had been submerged were probably now acclimatised to the frosty temperature, and we were somewhat consoled by the evidences of no actual freezing in progress. The snap tackle on double hooks was removed and replaced by single hooks on gimp. That was the one promising chance left us—to fish with a single hook

inserted in the lip of the smallest

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of the baits. Some of these were too small for spinning, as we now discovered for the first time, but what would have been a cause of offence had the water been in its proper condition was now a blessing in disguise; as the Dominie said, they were just the medicine for the disease.

We still, however, had to use the float in order to cast out to within about a foot of the ice edge. Consolation soon came with proof that there were wideawake pike near us, but their actions were unnaturally gentle and their purpose half-hearted. Twice in quick succession there were runs and a missed fish. I still stuck to him, however; after two or three additional make-believes he was hooked, and fortunately just turned the balance at the 4-lb. limit which the ticket specified as the minimum. Moving up to the second open space presently we had simultaneously a period of equal and modest amusement, with obviously small pike playfully mocking us with false runs. I bungled a sizeable fish for my friend, or rather could not reach it on account of the shortness of the pocket gaff. The pike had been brought into the outer fringe of weeds, where he managed to hang himself up, gaping in protest, and it was not worth while wading into water on such a day for anything under at least 20 lb. The

alternative was to seize the line and pull

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continuously, but the hook tore out just as the prize was within an inch of the steel.

Shortly afterwards I landed a respectable fish of 7 lb., illustrating the strange things that will happen in fishing. As previously, there had been futile runs; the rule in using a small bait on a single hook through the lip is to strike when the pike, after taking, has moved away to the distance of, say, a yard; but this now failed. The fish having been already missed once and twice, at the third essay I gave myself a longer margin of time. I let him take his morsel away at least three or four yards. Even then the hook came back without the bait, proof positive that the pike were in no really taking humour, but were out of sheer ' cussedness' seizing the small fish as they struggled at the end of the line, holding them in their prickly jaws athwart the middle, and probably never intending to turn them into the mouth as per regulation. Next time I decided to play the game and abide the issue.

Casting in a new bait I put down the rod, and moved on to where my friend was fishing, gossiping for ten minutes with him, all the time with an eye on my own float. Once I fancied there was that preliminary skim of the cork which indicates

an intention to attack; but the painted object kept above water.

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Moving down to be ready, fancying that the bait might be dead, and knowing how essential it is in icy cold water to change continually, I proceeded to winch in, and then discovered to my amazement that not only was the bait gone, but with it the hook itself. There might have been some fraying, as there often will be when there is ice, although so far as one knows the gimp has never touched it. However, baits were plentiful, and I promptly reinstated the former snap tackle of two sets of double hooks.

At the expiration of ten or fifteen wearisome minutes down went the float and a fish was hooked. It proved to be my old tantaliser, for in its mouth was my lost single hook and the young roach which had been attached to it. The hook was in the lip, and the bait was mashed lengthwise down the middle of the upper jaw. How the hook had become embedded in one portion and the bait transfixed to another was not clear, but it was sufficiently patent that the bait was left embedded in the serrated roof, where the masses of small teeth point inwards. The roach, being very small, was flattened and stuck there just as toffee, if one can carry one's memory back so many years, would sometimes adhere to the juvenile

palate.

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It was a diverting object lesson after all, though not, perhaps, worth our long drive and disappointment. Here was a pike that had not only after false runs become hooked and lost, but within a quarter of an hour had taken the bait which had been fatal, while the other was still sticking to the roof of its serrated interior. Another notable circumstance was that the float had never fairly disappeared when the hook was lost; ergo, the gimp must have been bitten through at the first chop.

The day was waning, it was three o'clock, and it was now freezing splendidly. The rings of the rods were being filled with ice, though the sun, rapidly declining, was still bright. On the way down to the carriage which awaited us near the boat-house, we experimentally gave our first stopping place a final trial, and my friend was fortunate in finding and catching a pike at his last cast. Even as we stood there this small free space became imperceptibly circumscribed ; before I could prepare a bait for my own rod ice was appearing, and in the course of twenty minutes a film was upon the entire surface. Like reasonable men we accepted the token as order to march, wound up, stowed our goods away, and got clear of the lanes into the high road before the light had quite departed.

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CHAPTER V

PIKE FISHING IN RIVERS

The fascination of the lake, notwithstanding the certainty of the fish being there and the comparative ease with which they are to be taken, does not weaken the undoubted fact that, to the man in full health and vigour, the best of sport will be obtained from the river. If one could arrive at the real predilections of the pike, we may be certain that he, too, would prefer the active stream. Life must be just a little too easy for him among the water weeds of the placid lakes, where the hunting for prey, which must be one of the delights of his existence, is apt to be tame and unexciting.

The pike, we may take it for granted, loves the river and flourishes in it, and it is wonderful how he will explore the ditches and brooks to find his way to it. We need not believe that pike are gifted with the power, or are wont to indulge in the r\abit, of wriggling

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across the grass from pond to stream, though rare examples

of such curious overlanding may be quoted. They get to the rivers somehow, and all preservers of trout will tell you that it is nothing short of marvellous to realise how mysteriously pike will appear where they are not invited, and how pertinaciously they gain headway if they are not kept down by every known device. In a subsequent chapter the ravages of pike in a trout stream will be dealt with by a sure hand.

It was only the other day that the people living on the banks of the Wye reluctantly announced that their once splendid salmon stream was degenerating into a sort of pike preserve ; and, at a meeting of the Board of Conservators, at which the injury done to the river by coarse fish was discussed, the chairman stated that a gentleman (whose name was given) had, in the previous year, caught 500 pike with his own rod, whilst in the portion of the year which had already expired (the meeting taking place in May) he had killed 200 in the Wye and its tributaries. Some all-round anglers might have been delighted to find that the Wye was becoming a pike river, but the friends of the kingly salmon would recognise with apprehension that there was danger indeed for the most valuable fisheries, more especially as year by year it had been discovered beyond doubt that the shoals of

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smolts going down to sea in the spring were becoming

periodically fewer.

Pike, as a rule, prefer streams that are comparatively sluggish and fairly deep. But they are very cosmopolitan in their tastes, Bohemian in their habits, at times infest the shallowest of rivers, and, at certain periods of the year, may be found even upon the shallows. Every trout fisher who plies a minnow early in the season over a gravelly bed of, say, a foot or eighteen inches deep will be able to vouch for encounters with pike of moderate size.

While the pike himself will be happy in the choicest of hunting grounds in a river, being able to seek his game with the unfailing stimulus of an opposing current, the angler derives positive benefit from running water. There is always, of course, a certain amount of sentiment to be pardoned in comparing the charms of lake versus river. Everybody likes water in motion. It is the painted ship upon the painted ocean that is the type of horrible stagnation. Our rivers, too, are of many moods; we have the roar of the great rushing salmon river, the tinkling murmur and intermittent babble of the trout stream over its shining gravel; and then, for the pike fisher, there is the silent, slow-going volume of water ever stealing seawards, with its eddies

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and swirls, and here and there the diapason tones of a weir or the sharper effects of a tumbling bay.

The acquisition of knowledge as to where a pike should be found in this or that river is something of a sport in itself. One or two types of rivers and the character of the sport it affords may be sketched. The Ouse of the Midlands—Cowper's river—is in its way very typical of the favourable pike stream; and it is not possible to specify a more wholesome and winsome exercise than a day's easy spinning along the Huntingdonshire or Bedfordshire meadows. If the river can be fished without the employment of a boat, so much the better. The pike is not by any means a shy fish, but he has his days of moroseness and inaction, when the passage of a boat must be reckoned among the disadvantages of pike fishing. It is with the pike fisher as with the salmon fisher— few men would care to angle from a boat when they could take their sport from the bank.

The pike angler on foot goes to the river in light marching order, bag or basket at back, gaff neatly swung, and natural or artificial baits at hand. He may work with energy or handle the rod as gently as he chooses. Here, to begin with, is a long stretch of broad, uniformly deep water, with weeds here and there in patches of varying dimensions. It

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is something of an instinct to recognise the haunts where the pike will be stationed to-day or to-morrow. He is a roamer, but in such a reach as we are now supposing the safe plan is to spin the water systematically throughout. You proceed down stream, making your early casts at short distances, increasing them by degrees to from twenty to thirty yards. Let the bait alight somewhat down stream, so that the current may at once assist you in producing that one thing needful in this business—namely, a regular spin, sometimes straight, sometimes wobbling, of whatever lure you may have selected for the conditions of the day.

The sedges and flags, which take the place of the tall reeds and bullrushes of the lakes, are an agreeable and useful boundary between water and field. Whether you cast from the Nottingham winch, and are therefore not troubled by inconvenient growths at your feet, or whether, taking advantage of the short sward upon which you walk, you coil your line at your feet, you are kept in a stimulating state of exercise, and there is the added advantage of fishing over a quantity of water during the day. Many fishing men have curious fads as to clothes and equipment; but if the pike fisher takes care to keep himself dry and to protect himself with real waterproof boots, he need not concern himself much about

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colour or texture of cloth, for on the severest of winter days he will find it convenient to put off the overcoat, and possible to finish up a day's sport in a tingle of healthy satisfaction.

There is a type of river that affords peculiar enjoyment in pike fishing. I have one in my mind's eye at the present moment. It is a winding alternation of holes and shallows. There are incidental eddies at recurring intervals, deep places overhung with alders and willows, and, at the beginning and end, a mill pool. In such water the character of the sport is greatly enhanced by uncertainty as to where and when you may meet with your pike. His proper place should be in one of those harbouring holes, or under an overhanging bank; but there are times, governed apparently by no fixed rules, when he absents himself from headquarters and raids the shallows where trout or dace may be disporting.

The vagaries of the fish and his habits may be admirably studied along such rivers as this. In them you may hook your pike with worm or even paste, and I remember on a summer morning, in a well-preserved trout fishery of the .Kentish Stour, floating a medium-sized alder over what I took to be a trout lying on the gravel, and fairly rising and hooking a jack. He was a frisky youngster of something between

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two and three pounds, and, fortunately, was hooked without the gut coming in contact with his sharp-set teeth. He gave me a lively dance up and down that shallow before I could greet him in the landing net, and it was with sincere satisfaction that I relieved the bonny brown trout of the stream from one of their hereditary enemies.

I can recall another occasion, a day intended to be devoted to grayling fishing, when, disgusted with the lack of sport, I had sat me down on a felled trunk by a stretch of the river winding through a marsh intersected with rushy ditches, and the keeper casually remarked that in the particular part where we happened to be there were generally one or two pike. All the rivers in the country were abnormally low that year, and no part of this could be at any time called deep. It so happened that I had only one artificial bait in a general box which I carried, and that was a piece of silver and reddened metal curved in rude resemblance of a fish; at any rate, it spun properly. I had luckily a small trace that would meet the emergency after a fashion, and, without much serious intent, I cast this bait down stream, and worked it slowly up parallel with the bank.

As if he knew that all his tribe were free to live

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between October and April, behold a trout must needs risk the hooks ! Fortunately for himself he behaved meekly in the net and while the triangle was being extricated, so that he was little the worse for his adventure and went off rejoicing. A little further up there was a bend in the river with an eddy and a hole which surely must harbour a pike. I spun past his probable lodgings, and saw a light brown fish form as long as my arm follow the spinner at a respectful distance. The clear water permitted a distinct view of the manoeuvre, and enabled me to notice that, three times in succession, the pike followed without touching the bait, always lagging about a foot in the rear of it; if I spun swiftly he put on speed, and when I checked the rate of progress he also would still maintain the interval of distance. At the fourth spin a trout dashed from under the bank at the bait, which missing, he shot across into the centre of the stream, passing on the traverse under the nose of the too artful pike.

The stream had been moderate so far, but by-and-by we arrived at a corner of virtually dead water, with a promontory which invited me to take position and spin its length close to some reeds. At last, then, I hooked my fish, and a lively one it was, arching my split-cane like a willow wand. Yet

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it was no pike. It turned out to be a grizzly pated, wolfish jawed, black, reprehensible trout, as antiquated as the hills. I scooped him out with some difficulty in the small net, and it was with true self-denial and some reluctance that I stuck to the letter of the law and returned him to the water, knowing, as I did, that it would be for the advantage of the stream at large that such an undesirable tenant should be destroyed. There are some pike which never show respectable fight, and a quarter of an hour after my abnegation re the trout I contrived to circumvent one of them. He was lying under a steep, perpendicular bank in dark, lazy water, a dozen yards further down stream than my standpoint, and, as his predecessor had done, he issued forth without flurry or dash as if on an official tour of inspection when my bright bait flashed prettily abreast of him. He adventured in the same way a second time, and as I was smiling at his cautious pursuit of the spinner, another pike—a smaller one—ascended in haste from the depths, very much like a rising grayling, and was immediately hooked. This jack was as full of pluck as fish could be, and by good hap the hooks were in the lip and the gut trace safe. With the net I could do nothing, and the keeper, who had been with me during my grayling fishing, had gone away for the time,

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to return again later in the afternoon. I am one of those

anglers (and I confess it without a blush) who dislike laying hands on a pike struggling and snapping in the water, and I always hasten to dispatch him out of water with the ' priest' before attempting to meddle with the hooks in the mouth. I had to stoop down, however, to insert my finger and thumb in the wretch's eyes, and was not a little proud to weigh him—after I had given him his quietus—at a trifle under the 8 lb. I took another pike of 4 J lb. before, at about four o'clock, a hatch of olive duns and rising grayling induced me to resume the more scientific branch of the day's work. The rod, being one of special excellence, was none the worse for its application to pike.

Once it came in my way to have the opportunity of noticing the vagaries of pike in a river of another character—a typical trout stream. It is a not uncommon error to say that the pike, bold and brutal, will rush recklessly at anything and everything, and may be caught by Tom, Dick, and Harry with little trouble and no skill. Slight experience will, however, undeceive a person who entertains such an idea, and he will not be long in learning that pike may become as shy and require as careful fishing as even trout.

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I suppose it is all a question of appetite. Certainly there are days when anything will answer in pike fishing, and when the roughest bait, most clumsily thrown, will be as successful as the most artistically presented lure.

This was a Hampshire trout stream, and one of those private tenancies where it is a sacred duty to kill pike as vermin. It was the rule of the water that they should be kept down, stamped out, warred against without consideration of seasons or the ordinary laws of sport. Pike are the game fish of the humble angler who frequents the public rivers, and it is then that we cherish and preserve them. It was otherwise with the stream with which we are now concerned.

A clump of alders overhung the water at a favourite lurking place for pike and, between two of the trees, was a gap upon which the light slanted so favourably that, by lying prone upon the meadow and peering into the depths, you could watch whatever was going on or along. In this retreat there always seemed to be a pike, and as it appeared to me from above, half of the body then in possession—which was little less than a yard in length—was concealed by the hollowed-out bank. His snout was always pointed towards the middle of the pool. It could

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hardly be called a stream which ran through it, but there was steady motion : for now a leaf, now a twig, could be observed gyrating in and out and around, to drift away presently when it caught the current The pike lay within the still backing of this eddy. The bottom was mostly sand, but there were one or two clumps of aquatic plant. I watched that pike off and on for hours in the hope of seeing him catch a fish. Some dozen perch occupied the hole in confidence, for the pike took no notice of them.

After maintaining my position for an hour one morning, the pike ever keeping his duck-like bill pointed outwards, a shoal of roach came scurrying into the shelter from the middle of the river, driven, I suppose, by a smaller pike that dared not intrude. This was the chance of my friend! He made one lightning streak, and when things had settled he was back in his old place with a roach of, perhaps, six inches crosswise in his jaws. It almost seemed that the green eyes of the jack were twirling with satisfaction. He made no sign of gorging his prey, and it was the strangest sight of all to watch the minute specks of silver floating in the water as the scales of the roach were crunched gradually from its small carcase. The most curious circumstance was that, after keeping the creature in his mouth in this fashion for at least ten

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minutes, he let it go, and the released victim had life enough left to stagger off and be carried down, feebly resisting, by the stream.

One day the pike lay in the unaccustomed position of head up-stream—that is to say, parallel with the bank—and there, wonder of wonders ! a considerable number of roach were tranquilly resting in the hole. The pike appeared to have one baleful eye upon them, and they on their part seemed to have all eyes upon the pike, who lay with his- mouth grimly shut and without moving a fin. My theory was that the roach knew perfectly well that, at this particular time, perhaps * for this occasion only/ they were in no peril from the tyrant A similar observation was afforded me on another occasion—roach herding at ease at no great distance from a pike lying inert. A friend who was equipped with a spinning rod consented on the last morning of my stay in those parts to try experiments. I explained to him where and what the pike was, and besought him so to handle his tackle that I might observe how the fish behaved himself. My friend, who was really a clever pike fisher, also learned something. He was under the impression that his spinning bait was travelling truly when it was actually moving in the most erratic fashion, and we both became convinced on that occasion that one of the

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common faults of the pike fisherman is spinning too high. Here was the fish lying apparently near to the bottom, probably about a foot off, and the angler's spinning bait, which he thought was working deep, was at least four feet above the pike. I gave him the hint, and he then worked the bait more slowly, thereby allowing it to proceed on a deeper course. The pike, who had paid no attention to the bait when it passed over his head (though had he been hungry he would have dashed up at it to the very top, perchance out of the water), gave a little frisk of the tail when the lure travelled at somewhat close quarters. By-and-by he took obvious notice of the bait, moved outwards, followed it not more than a foot behind; and then dropped idly back to his place. He noticed the bait as often as it spun by him, but never again moved at it.

This, however, was a day of experiments, and we tried him again a little later, while the friendly light still gave us a good view of the bottom of the pool. This time, for the sake of change, we rigged up a paternoster with the usual plummet at the end of a salmon gut collar, a gimp single hook with dace next to it, a similar hook with minnow next to that, and a gudgeon above all—three baits at intervals of twelve inches. At the first drop of the plummet

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succeeded. Here was the master position, and it was the biggest fish that held the castle against all comers.

In a later chapter on Trolling a brief description is given of a somewhat modern tackle which superseded the discredited dead gorge. This is so useful in rivers that there need be no apology for touching upon the subject in this place. The spinning bait, as we have seen, very frequently passes over a fish at too great a distance above. It is the nature of the pike to have his fits of lethargy. He may be out of temper; he may be full, or half filled with food, and will not eat without some irresistible temptation. At such times of abstinence a

silvery bleak or dace, an imitation trout, or attractive spoon will spin in vain over his head. It is too much trouble; he is not inclined to set his fins in motion for the upward dash and forward rush that will come to him naturally enough when he is sharp set. You must then appeal, not to his carnal desires, but to the demon that is in him.

You may sometimes provoke him if you are using a bait that will descend to his level. A properly adjusted dainty on the snap tackle devised for the purpose is precisely the temptation, perhaps the only one, likely to move the pike. This theory of going down to your fish was the strong feature of the old

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gorge bait, and it is the strong point of its sportsmanlike successor. The bait touches the bottom, is worked up and down, and often, therefore, brings spoil to the basket when other means fail. Holes, eddies, backwaters, and the weedy reaches are the situations where the tackle may be used with effect.

For the same reasons and in the same places the paternoster should be the tackle for live baiting. It is not easy to adjust float tackle to the required depth. This may be done in lakes, but the flow of the river carries the live fish that is kept in

place by the float at varying speeds over varying depths past the game. The paternoster brings it tolerably close, and it has the advantage of remaining in one spot, with every lively movement exciting the watchful pike.

These are the methods best adapted also for highly coloured water. Water a little clouded is best for spinning. A very clear river is more suitable for live baiting, for in spinning it is with pike as with salmon: the fish lying low must see a good deal of the line and attached apparatus before the lure itself comes into view. I have known pike taken in yellow flood water by the use of the leger, but the paternoster for the living and the aforesaid snap tackle for the dead bait are the methods to be mostly relied upon under such circumstances.

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PIKE FISHING IN RIVERS

In rivers, thanks to the flow, rough and ready baits, if only they spin and glitter, are not to be despised as makeshifts. The most original of improvisations I have seen in baits was by an ingenious old gentleman who had learned how to adapt himself to unexpected circumstances in the Maori wars. He was perch fishing in a Berkshire river, where the fish were supposed to be of the major size and to require gimp rather than gut. Hooking a small perch, he observed that the zebra-

marked captive was followed by a pike. What was to be done? The rod, line, and winch would serve, and gimp was the very thing; but what of bait? Determined to have the pike if it could be managed, he sat down upon a willow stump and filled a fresh pipe to assist cogitation, playing absent-mindedly the while with the tobacco reserve as he puffed his briar-root Herein he found his inspiration. The silver foil of the two-ounce packet was the very thing as a leading principle. The rest came easy to an old campaigner. He whittled a piece of dead wood into a rude outline of a gudgeon, wrapped his silver foil about it, tied the taper ends fast with the thread which every good fisherman will have in his book, and then whipped the rough-and-ready phantom to the gimp, leaving the strong single perch hook an inch or so free at

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the tail. There could be no true spin, of course, but it served. The pike (it was a 14-pounder) came short at the first presentation, was hooked fairly at the second, played, his shoulder brought to the old soldier's finger and thumb, and landed.

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CHAPTER VI

THE ANCIENT ART OF TROLLING

Amongst the many things which in our young days we accept as honestly expedient, in course of time to be taught that they are not .lawful, must be included the art of trolling mentioned in the previous chapter. It is in recent times that this old-fashioned method of catching pike has been widely discountenanced. Two or three sound reasons are accepted for the discontinuance of a practice which was held in honour for centuries. The question of cruelty had better perhaps be passed over in silence, or at most with the confession that this is probably a style of angling which gives most pain to the captured fish.

The strongest argument against trolling was the knowledge that, as it must be fatal to every fish hooked, undersized pike were slaughtered. Time was, maybe, when this did not matter; but as anglers multiplied, and the single spies became battalions, it was perceived that the stock of fish was dangerously

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menaced, and eventually the logic of the situation was felt to be unanswerable. On the Thames in consequence a prohibitory bye-law has within the last decade been passed and is enforced rendering trolling for pike according to the

ancient customs a specific offence. In my boyhood no one had apparently ever heard a whisper against what everybody considered a legitimate form of sport, and, indeed, the pleasure to be derived from trolling was undoubtedly great —so great that I will ask the reader's toleration if I dilate upon. it.

The beginning of trolling takes us back to far-off days, and the young reader at any rate will probably agree with me that it is interesting to trace the evolution of this bygone business. Let us start, therefore, with the famous 'The Treatyse of Fysshynge with an Angle/ attributed rightly or wrongly to Dame Juliana Barnes (or Berners). If the work was really written by this pious lady (though the history of the ' Treatyse' is another story), she had a very workmanlike notion of the manner of fishing for pike ; but it may here be remarked that the statement in the books of the last century that pike were introduced into England in the reign of Henry VIII. do§s not at all tally with the good dame's references in the pamphlet which bears the date of 1450.

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It may be premised, however, in a general way, that the device of trolling, as we learned it as boys, was based upon the idea of running a leaded wire through a dead fish from the mouth to the tail, leaving one or two hooks closely lying

up the outside with barb protruding slightly from the side or sides of the mouth. Broadly speaking, Dame Juliana Berners acted upon the same principle. This is the paragraph upon the subject from * The Treatyse of Fysshynge,' and, although it is not trolling proper, it will be seen that it is the origin of the plan; but this tackle required a float, and the dead fish so baited on a codling hook was left to dangle in the water :—

The pyke is a good fysshe : but for he devouryth so many as well of his owne kynde as of other : I loue hym the lesse. & for to take hym ye shall doo thus. Take a codlynge hoke: & take a roche or a fresshe heering & a wyre wyth an hole in the ende : & put it in at the mouth and out at the taylle downe by the ridge of the fresshe heeryng. And thenne put the lyne of your hoke in after & drawe the hoke in to the cheke of the fresshe heeryng. Then put a plumbe of lede vpon your lyne a yerde longe from youre hoke & a flote in myd-waye betwene : & caste it in a pytte where the pyke vsyth. And this is the beste and moost surest crafte of takynge the pyke.

We advance a little further in a * Booke of Fishing with Hooke and Line' by * L.M.,' printed by John

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Wolfe, and first sold at the Little North Door of St. PauPs, at the sign of the Gun, in 1590 ; and there were other editions

which followed. The compilation is in many respects an echo of other works, notably Charles Estienne's ' L'Agriculture et Maison Rustique,' and he likewise adopts almost verbatim the sentence above quoted from Dame Juliana. He has, however, discovered that the float was much out of place with the tackle there described, and recommends that having drawn your wire out of the bait's tail you must * put you line thereto ' and draw it up and down the water or pool. This is really the essence of the system, the main principle of trolling, known in modern times as ' working the bait.' ' If he see it,' L.M. (Leonard Mascall) continues, ' he will take it in haste. Let him go with it awhile, and then strike and hold, and so tire him in the water/

Having delivered himself of this improvement the old author returns to Dame Juliana's idea of the plummet of lead placed a yard from the hook, and a float above the lead; but he adds on his own account the advice not to allow the bait to sink too low, ' for then the yeeles will eat your bait away.' He also, like the Dame, recommends the frog, which is to be put in ' boares grease' or ' Asa fetida,' boiled; and he innocently adds that the angler should take a roach

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or other small fish, dry it in his bosom, and ' anoint

him with the aforesaid composition.'

Not many years later 'The Secrets of Angling, the choicest Tooles, Baytes, and Seasons, for the taking of any Fish, in Pond or River,' by ' J. D.' (1613), and sold at Roger Jackson's shop near Fleet Street Conduit, appeared. 'J. D.' was once thought to be John Davors, but it is now as certain as such things can be that the author was John Dennys, Esquire, an English country gentleman. Two worthy workers who are now at their rest, Mr. T. Westwood and Mr. Thomas Satchell, in our own time entered fully into the question of authorship. This fishing book is in verse, and I may be forgiven for quoting the stanza referring to the fish with which we are con-. cerned:

For the Pike or Pearch

Now for to take these kinde of Fish with all, It shal be needful to haue still in store, Some liuing baites as Bleiks, & Roches small, Goodgion, or Loach, not taken long before, Or yealow Frogges that in the waters craule, But all aliue they must be euermore.

For as for baites that dead & dull doe lye, They least esteeme & set but little by.

J. D., Esquire, carries the ethics of trolling further than his predecessors, wisely laying stress upon the

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necessity of sound tackle, and giving a hint which should not be unnoticed of the silk and the twisted hair lines which staunchly held their own until the present generation, and are still in favour with patriarchal fly fishers. Leaving the predatory fish for a moment, I may add that the versifier has three stanzas about the bottom-feeding fish which eat corn, seed, crumbs of bread, paste or cheese, grasshoppers, wasps, hornets, bees, berries, worms, snails, buzzing flies, and 'crauling ientiles small.' But he soon returns to the tyrants of the water that are shunned by the rest.

In his ' Walton and the Earlier Fishing Writers,' Mr. R. B. Marston says that so far as he has been able to discover,

Thomas Barker was the first English writer to mention the use of the winch. Published in 1651, we have from him a curious little book called ' Barker's Delight, or the Art of Angling, wherein are discovered many rare secrets very necessary to be known by all that delight in that recreation, both for catching the fish, and dressing thereof.' Walton had apparently read his Barker, and borrowed therefrom in his brief reference to trolling.

Father Izaak was so much a contemporary of the Thomas Barker quoted by 'Piscator,' that in 1653 Richard Marriot, the St. Dunstan's Churchyard

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publisher of the ' Delight,' brought out the first edition of ' The Complete Angler.' Walton seems to have had a somewhat childish belief in the virtues of gum of ivy in oil of spike for the anointing of a dead bait, and we may without unkindness assume that he was not an experienced or enthusiastic pike fisher. His observations were either historical or natural history gossip, and for all his immortal idyll informs us to the contrary, he had little more personal experience of pike than he had of salmon fishing. It is to be noted that he speaks of the ledger bait for live bait fishing, and the walking bait for trolling, but his practical directions are confined to the live bait, either fish or frogs.

It will be seen from the foregoing that it has not been strictly correct to write and speak of Robert Nobbs, Esquire, A.M. (he calls himself by this title, but is suspected of having been a Northamptonshire clergyman holding the vicarages of Applethorp and Wood Newton) as the ' father of trollers;' yet he was a man who undoubtedly made trolling a speciality, regarded it as a cult, and considered it worthy of a monograph. This, indeed, is the correct designation of his work, 'The Complete Troller, or the Art of Trolling, with descriptions of all the instruments, tackle, and materials, requisite for a gentleman troller,

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and directions how to use them,' published in 1682. The dedication to him by ' G. D., of Trinity College,' and the author's lines on the antiquity and invention of fishing, bespeak cultured men who were on familiar terms with their Bible.

The natural history of the book must not be taken at all as gospel, but the practical matters as to the haunts and habits of the fish from the angler's point of view are unquestionable. The * snap' as a tackle was not unknown to Nobbs (or Nobbes), and he tells us it was an aflair with springs. The

theory of seasons was probably elastic for all kinds of fishing, for after describing the sport to be enjoyed in the depth of winter, and continuing his advice during March as a month very seasonable to the troller, excepting the time of spawning, he adds that April will make amends for former sufferings and is a month inviting to sport that is both pleasant and profitable. Nobbs goes into raptures about this month, glorifying the chirping birds which then begin to seek their mates, the long silent cuckoo that forsook her cold climate again saluting the sprouting branches telling us the news of approaching summer, and the tender swallow which, joyful at her first flight, when she seems to make obeisance at your bait, displays her wings upon the surface of the waters.

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It shocks us in these days of Mundella Acts to read the statement that the month of April will be found most propitious to the pastime of trolling; because the weeds * which have couched all winter have not yet erected their heads to annoy the bait or frustrate the hopes of an impatient fisherman.' The river is also then free from fog and filth, and the fish, which have lately cast their spawn, are now more hungry and ready for their prey, not so apt to forsake the bait as they did in March. The pike fishers of Nobbs's day were rather afraid of the depth of winter, and after the October or

November floods the angler is recommended to lay aside his tackle for the season.

Nobbs attached his hooks to wire that should not be rugged or knotty, but sound and strong. The wire seems to have been made in lengths, and not in one twisted piece as later, and the joining principle enabled our ancestors to shorten it to the length of the bait's body. They were content with a decidedly short line; certainly, the modern angler would consider thirty yards too short by half. The incipient winch is outshadowed in a paragraph which says that 'as to the managing of the line, you may wind it upon a reel that turns upon a ring, with your finger in it, having no more in your hand than you make use of, so you may unwind it at your leisure.'

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I have seen anglers in the Midlands adopting another method of this early epoch—viz. allowing the whole length of the line, without winch, to trail after them. Nobbs approves of this as a very good plan provided there are no such impediments as shrubs or bushes behind, but urges the objection that drawing the line over the ground wears it out rapidly. He approvingly notes that it dries sooner, and that when the pike is hasty and furious there is no bother in

unwinding ; ' the shortest way to trepan him is to have your line at command and in complete readiness.'

Our next step in the evolution takes us far into the next century, when Thomas Best, who was Keeper of his Majesty's Drawing-room in the Tower of London, published in 1787 a slender i2mo. book which was exceedingly popular, for it ran through many editions in the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries. In the tenth edition, which I have before me, the title-page proclaims careful revision, correction, and enlargement, and the preface opens with the satisfactory assertion that since the first publication upwards of 20,000 copies had been sold.

The author of this modest work had at any rate something of an acquaintance with the pike, describing him as a solitary, melancholy, and bold fish, who feeds

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on small fishes, frogs, and (here follows error)' pickerel weed.' Two ways of angling for pike are known to him, and these he designates the ledger bait and the walking bait. The ledger bait is to all intents and purposes the night-lining pleasure surreptitiously practised by country folk to the

present day. Dace, gudgeon, roach, or a live frog have to be impaled on a hook through the upper lip or back fin. A short line of ten or twelve yards is tied to some stake in the ground or stump of a tree, the line passing over the fork of a stick suspending the hook by a yard of line in the water. At the tug the fork gives way, the line runs out, and the bait is pouched.

The * walking bait' brings us at once to trolling. Best spells it 'trowling,' and adds that 'the word comes from the French troller, to move or walk about* His description of the tackle to be used is substantially accurate, and the necessity of a strong rod, rings, and winch was quite understood in his days. He also recommends a swivel at the end of a line, explains that two single hooks may be tied back to back upon strong gimp, and that the tackle makers sell them made of one piece of wire. The lead was then what it is now, a weight of conical formation and angular at the point.

In the tackle shops of to-day you may also

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purchase the brass needle about seven inches long into the eye of which the loop of the gimp is to be fastened for threading the tackle through the bait. The repulsive

suggestion is thrown out, however, that in those days living fish were treated in this fashion, for in giving instructions as to putting the lead into the mouth of the bait and sewing it up, Best says : ' The fish will live some time, and though the weight of the lead will keep his head downwards he will swim with nearly the same ease as if at liberty.' One may be inclined to fancy that Mr. Thomas Best seldom practised this method himself; most assuredly there would be very little kick left in the strongest bait with a couple of inches cube of lead in his stomach, and gimp passing through the body and out at the tail. The whole art of trolling, however, is described fairly and fully, and in a manner to represent the process, in reasonably few words.

THE DECLINE OF TROLLING

Coming to comparatively modern times, we may assume from this story of evolution, and the assumptions and statements of all writers on angling until the school of 'Ephemera' and Francis Francis inaugurated a new era, that trolling was a fashionable

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and unquestioned method of fishing for pike. About twenty-five years ago, however, the evils of the dead gorge began to be pointed out and the practice of using it denounced. One of

the oldest of London angling societies, perhaps the oldest of all, is the True Waltonian, which was established in 1830, and the coat of arms composed by the founders is a pictorial representation of two stalwart gentlemen in the low crowned, curly brimmed hats and high collared coats of the period, supporting a shield upon which the words ' With only these ' are inscribed, encircling a triangle in which are entwined a pike and a trout Round the border are sketches of an angler's equipment of the days when the century was young. There are floats, plummets, bait cans, reels, but never a sign of a spinning bait. The gorge hook, however, sign manual of trolling, and the necessary baiting needle are conspicuous; the angler on the right-hand side of the shield is dangling an artificial fly, while his brother on the left holds in his fingers the dead roach ready for trolling.

It has been before asserted that this was a most delightful form of fishing, and what further space is devoted to the subject will serve, not only as a reminiscence, but as an instruction to fishers on streams where pike are to be regarded as vermin and therefore

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killed down by all and every means. It will not be unsportsmanlike if the destroyer of vermin continues to extract as much sport as he can out of the process of

destruction.

Let me invite the reader to the kind of trolling excursion which some of us enjoyed to the full, say, forty years ago. It is an October day before the floods or frosts have removed the rotting weeds, which are hanging, as it were, by a filament and only require some extra push to be released. There will be many under-water copses of aquatic plants which have not yet begun to rot. Be sure that the pike will be found where decay is least advanced; he will be lurking in the best of the cover on the look out for any unheeding fish that passes by.

One of our difficulties used to be the obtaining of baits. Nowadays natural baits for pike are to be purchased at most of the tackle shops, preserved in some effective solution, and if they are not quite as good as the freshly caught fish they are better than nothing. Roach, dace, and gudgeon, moreover, are to be secured, at any rate in the country, but the wise man's plan always was to be certain about his baits over-night. A dozen of them would be placed in a box filled with bran, and a couple would be already prepared for immediate use.

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SEARCHING THE WEEDS

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The process was simple enough. The gimp attachment to the wire of the gorge hook was caught up by the eye of the baiting needle, which was passed through the body of the fish and out at the tail. It was of importance that the two outstanding hooks at the end of the lead should be pulled home between the lips of the fish, and the workmanlike method was to stitch the latter together and tie the tail fin close to the wire, which should just protrude at the end. All the fins, including any fragment of the tail that had not been tied close, would be cut off with the scissors. These precautions were to prevent the bait from catching in weeds, always a hindrance to be guarded against in trolling. The body of the bait would be kept rigid by the twisted wire and lump of lead in its inside, and it was possible that the pike, seizing the bait across the middle according to its custom, would become conscious of the presence of a hard and unnatural body in the inside, and therefore reject the lure. In order to escape this chance of a loss, a form of tackle was invented in which the lead, which was the sinking power, consisted of a number of large shot. These, however, had the effect of doubling the bait up too quickly without altogether

obviating the effect of the pike's teeth touching it. The baits thus ready for use were placed in the

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bran with the others, and at the waterside you had the angler with his bag at his back and his gaff slung in some convenient way. He wandered along the river-side, and, arriving at a hole or eddy or place where his experience told him a pike would be lurking, he would drop the bait in the quietest possible manner into the water, first of all close to the bank. The bait should touch the bottom, and then by a deft up and down movement of the rod with the right hand, and an indrawing with the left of the line, to be coiled on the grass by his side, he would bring the bait out of the water, and with not more than a yard of the line hanging from the top would make the next cast a little further out.

Working the water by this roving and sinking method, slowly or briskly as he might be inclined, in favourable rivers, it was thus possible to fish, as the saying goes, every inch of the water with the thirty yards of line at his disposal. The real sport of the method came when the fish attacked the bait. As a rule the pike would seize it by the middle, and the skill of the angler, which could only be gained by experience, was displayed to begin with by his immediately distinguishing the strike of a fish from such an obstruction as a weed. The line

would then be left in all respects free, and if the pike was in earnest

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it would immediately dash, or glide slowly away to its haunt, wherever that might be. Sometimes it would be ten or twelve, sometimes twenty or thirty, yards off; but it was imperative that there should be no check to this movement of the fish.

Having executed its run, the fish would stop for the natural process of pouching or gorging—that is to say, the pike would gradually twist round the bait until its head was absorbed; the body and tail followed, and, when the appetite was good, the whole was pretty rapidly taken down into the tight gullet. It will not be forgotten that there were only two points of hooks protruding, perhaps no more than \ inch on either side of the gill covers of the bait, but the gullet closes so tightly over the object that even .these were sufficient to hold the pike when in due time the barbs were struck in.

This, however, is to anticipate a little; the time for striking has not yet arrived. We have followed the fish to its haunt or lair, and left it in the act of pouching. This was one of the prime excitements of the transaction. Sometimes a fish would gorge in a very leisurely way, occupying perhaps five or

even ten minutes. Not infrequently in the case of a big fellow in a sanguinary humour the bait would be pouched at a gulp. But the angler would be

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uncertain as to this, and must wait until the fish began to move off again. This would be indicated in the majority of cases by a trembling of the line and a little tug which could easily be felt. Then it was the habit of the fish, having pouched his bait, the line all the time being perfectly free, to make another move, and then, according to the canons, the angler would winch up his line and slightly strike. The merest twitch would be sufficient, for the soft gullet is different from the armour plate of the mouth with which the spinner has to reckon. There was not much spirit left in a fish, however big it might be, with these cruel barbs in its vitals. It fought its best, but the fight was nothing to be compared to the dash of a fish hooked in the mouth. Occasionally, when the pike were not feeding keenly, the day would consist of nothing but false runs—that is to say, pike after pike would strike the bait, take it away to pouch it, and then reject it after all.

It will be seen from this sketch that a day's trolling was not a day of such exertion as is necessary with the spinning rod. The angler would move at his own pace, work his rod at

leisure, fish all kinds of curious places between weeds, and find new manoeuvres perhaps with every fish. Sometimes the pike would run under and between weeds ; hence the

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necessity of carrying clearing gear, miniature grapnels, and so forth, which one seldom requires now. It would be very amusing to watch some old-fashioned rustic troller, when a fish was found, carefully put down his rod and take out a turnip-shaped watch from an antique fob, believing, as the masters used to enjoin, that ten minutes was the minimum time to be allowed for pouching. That was the true rule, however, which I have indicated—viz. that after a fish had paused to pouch, it was safe to conclude that the transaction was done the moment he began to move again.

The chief objection to trolling, as has been already pointed out, was that there would be no opportunity of returning an undersized fish. In rivers where pike fishing was valued, if not cultivated as a sport, such a method should be sternly prohibited, for it is nothing less than wanton murder to kill pike of 1 lb., i\ lb., or 2 lb.

There was so much pleasure in this method of trolling for pike that when it became necessary to discountenance it in public waters, although they accepted the inevitable, old

practitioners did it with grievous reluctance. Was it possible to invent a substitute ? A few years ago an answer came in that special tackle by which the pleasure of trolling might

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be enjoyed without the infringement of the laws of sport. It has been briefly described in these pages, is called the 'Marston dead bait snap tackle,' and it allows you the old gorge fishing with the snap principle applied. A brass wire with a needle eye screws into a length of pipe lead, which gives the principle of weighting the bait so that it shall sink plump into the water, while the screw shaft enables the angler to lengthen the contrivance to suit the size of the bait. This avoids one of the nuisances of the old style. Unless the angler could ensure his bait being always the exact length of the wire to which the lead was welded, so that the eye should be just emerging from the root of the tail, he had to put up with much annoyance.

This modern bait is treated in somewhat the same manner as the old. The wire with the needle eye is thrust through the body, but the hooks do not protrude on the outside of the mouth. Two sets of double hooks lie up one side, with, however, the disadvantage that they must sooner or later

catch in the weeds. But we cannot have everything, and the user of this bait must take his chance and learn how to avoid the growth.

A somewhat similar form of tackle has been invented by John Bickerdyke, and of the principle

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generally it may be said that, when the weeds are down in the winter it is an excellent method of fishing for pike, but the mistake must not be made of striking too quickly. I have lost many a good fish by forgetting that the tackle was intended as a compromise, and was not to be regarded as the regular triangle flights of the ordinary spinning bait. Give the fish a yard run, and then hit him firmly.

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CHAPTER VII

SOME FOREIGN RELATIVES

If one may use the innocent violence of applying such a word

as 'ubiquitous' to a fish, it might be truly said that, at least in fresh water, the pike should be the first to claim it, for if Esox lucius himself is not to be found in every part of the world, some members of the family will certainly be traceable. Even in Australia there are what the scientific gentlemen call intermediate genera. The typical genus itself is of wide range, pervades the waters of Europe, and is most plentiful in the northern part of the new hemisphere. Probably the pike proper is found also in Asia, though I have failed to obtain direct evidence upon that point. When the ill-fated Edmund Donovan returned from his captivity at Merv, I surprised him one day at his table, littered higgledy-piggledy with rough maps, charts, notes, and drawings, stained more or less with dirt and water. From these he was writing his book, and pointing to a sketch of

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a river which he had crossed on horseback during his journey in the wilds, he said :

' You would have liked a day's fishing here, for it seemed to be swarming with fish !'

When I cross-questioned him as to the species, he replied that he could not be certain, but that to all appearance they were precisely similar to the pike he used to catch with frogs

in Ireland.

There are, of course, slight variations in the appearance of the pike of different countries, but these are mostly in the colourings. In the main features of its structure Esox lucius is the same where-ever he is found. There is a light-coloured fish called the Pike King in Central Europe, and its markings are uniformly dark. In this respect it resembles one of the American fishes of this family, and the varieties in North America are so interesting that I may perhaps be permitted to devote the remainder of this chapter to a consideration of them.

Although Professor Brown Goode says that there are five species of the Esox family natives of North America, the later ichthyologists on the other side of the Atlantic are even yet not quite agreed as to how their fish shall be classified; but I will merely mention three, taken from the latest official report from the State of New York: (1) The pike (Lucius lucius.

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Linnaeus); (2) the pickerel (Lucius reticulatus y Le Sueur); and (3) the maskinonge* {Lucius Masquinongy^ Mitch.). The American pike is to all intents and purposes the Esox lucius of the old world, and distinctly different from the other fish

with which it is vulgarly confused and which is called the pickerel. At home the word ' pickerel' is occasionally used to signify the very smallest form of jack, and it is used in the same sense as one would use the word ' pikelet;' but in America it is an actual variety. The markings of the pike, as the reader is well aware, are of white blotches irregularly dotted on an olive-yellow skin. The pickerel, which never reaches the size of large pike,

is marked with black veinings running laterally and

» assuming the form of irregular loops. It is a very

handsome little fish, and but for its appearance has the same characteristics as other members of the family.

The maskinonge' is a right noble member of the family and probably the largest of it. There seems to be no doubt that Esox nobiiior, as he used to be classified, is somewhat limited in his geographical range. I have seen him caught from the St. Lawrence River, and he is known to attain such weights as 60 lb. in the Great Lake range. An experience of my own, which I will presently relate, leads

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me to suppose that the familiar habit of exaggeration as to fish is practised across the ocean ; and though Professor

Brown Goode states that the maskinong£, according to numerous witnesses, 'often attains the weight of 80 lb. or more/ the big ones are rather rare. When found they are made a note of, with a good deal of tophamper for luck.

That enormous quantities are caught is beyond dispute, and I cannot imagine a place in the world where a man, equipped with strong and workmanlike tackle, would obtain a greater glut of this description of sport than in some of the lakes and connecting waterways of Canada and the adjacent parts of the Great Republic. It was a new experience for me to make my way to a small Canadian town situated at the foot of a lake which is quite undistinguished and scarcely known beyond the district in which it is located. Yet it teems with such fish as maskinong£, green bass, and miscellaneous smaller fry. Parties go there occasionally in the summer to moor their canoes among or outside the aquatic grasses, and with the coarsest of tackle haul out fish until the bottom of the boat is so covered that they give up and return to shore.

My object was to catch a maskinonge* and a bass. I failed with the latter, but had remarkable success

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with the former. This, however, is a little to anticipate.

It was inevitable that, while the frail canoe, the best fishrhg boat to be had, was being made ready, comparison should be instituted between the scene as it spread out before me and the landscape that would have met the eye round one of the ordinary lakes of the home country. Although the lake was so seemingly insignificant that it had no far-spread reputation, as I have said, it was one of a chain of waterways so extended that we might have passed close upon two hundred miles of lakes and connecting channels without landing. This particular lake was some fourteen miles long, one mile wide at the part upon which I fished, and rank with tough water plants. The little town, with its mostly weather-board buildings, was opposite a wooded island, and there was an air of sunshiny prosperity to which one gets accustomed, indicating a country where, if nobody is very rich, there is nobody who need be absolutely poor.

Standing on the primitive wharf, the ever-present loafers talked very boastfully about fish of 40 lb. The name maskinonge* was too long for daily use in a country where time and labour saving is carried to the extent of a fine art. They call the fish, therefore,

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' lunge,' and as such I will hereafter refer to it. My boatman said he had—Oh, yes, of course—seen 40-pounders taken. This might be; at any rate, from sundry cross-examinations and comparisons, and a good deal of conversation during a day on the lake, I had reason to believe that during an outing of four or five hours it was quite the usual thing to return with a dozen and a half or so of fish of from 9 to 12 lb. average.

The season opens there as in England, on June 15, and very little work is done ashore on that day. Every canoe is requisitioned, and a certain register which I scanned showed that during the first week the previous year within a few pounds of a ton of lunge and green bass had been landed daily by the boats. To be sure the three or four Chicago and other American parties who were there for fishing during my visit had a different tale to tell, having often returned with only perhaps a couple of fish of 4 or 5 lb., and this was so like our frequent experience at home that I moderated my expectations before I started.

The angler's equipment, I am bound to confess, appalled me. The canoe would contain two besides the boatman, but it afforded shockingly limited sitting room, and each thwart barely sufficed for a single

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person. The greatest care had to be exercised in shifting, for so frail was the little craft that the pressure of a quarter of a pound on the wrong side threatened an upset. This was a sorry prospect for the rod, and my brusque boatman scoffed at the idea of fishing for lunge with anything but the astounding gear which he exhibited. This was simplicity itself. The fishing from such a cranky craft, in which your seat is raised no more than six inches from the bottom boards, is done by hand line. With us it took the form of a coil of fifty yards the thickness of sash cord. To this was attached a huge Colorado spoon of the coarsest make, armed with one gigantic tail triangle adorned with a wisp of red wool, and attached to the line by a length of brass wire one-eighth of an inch thick.

You sit in the stern of the canoe with, say, twenty yards of line out, as the cockle shell is rowed up and down and across the lake. The weeds, however, were so rank at the time of my visit, which was in the month of August, that ten or fifteen yards of line were quite sufficient, and then the angler had continually to be hauling in to disengage some decayed stuff which the triangle had caught. Of course I had my way with the rod, a short, strong greenheart of about nine feet in * length, with a

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sea-trout line and twisted gut instead of gimp trace. The bait was a six-inch phantom. It should have been much larger for the sport of the place, and the boat ought at least to have afforded one an opportunity of standing up to cast between the weeds in the orthodox fashion.

Having taken a fourteen-stone friend, who sat in the narrow end seat holding a line in his hand and dodging the cramp as best he might by uneasily shifting from time to time—trailing, in point of fact, in its most primitive form—I occupied the slender thwart between the boatman and my companion. For a while I tried the experiment sitting of casting from right to left, but as the boatman was afraid that he would be caught, I had sometimes to descend to trailing with my tackle, and this became a chronic nuisance by reason of the numerous foulings. I may add that this rough method of trailing is the common mode of fishing on all American inland waters, and even the grand lake trout are caught in this way. The fish hook themselves, and if one is of size the man rows ashore, however great the distance may be, and you drag the captive along bodily. The tackle is so strong that there is no reason why a fish of a couple of hundred pounds, with patience, may not be safely beached in this way.

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THE PIKE

The boatman is always maintaining an easy pace, just sufficient, in fact, to keep the spoon on the spin, and it often happens that a slightly hooked fish escapes by tearage. The coarse triangle, however, once within the bony jaws would be struck into firm holding with the first rush. Rowing out towards a boat where a gentleman was trailing in this primitive fashion, the boatman informed me that the Indians —of whom a tribe or two or the remnants of them are allowed to live and do a little farming on the island opposite —have a tradition that in August and part of September the lunge shed their teeth, and that during this period they never take bait or food in any shape or form. Whether there is any truth in this I know not, but, thinking the boatman might have informed me of it by way of moderating any expectations I might have of sport, I made subsequent inquiries from a professor in Toronto, and he said that the legend certainly did exist.

On approaching the canoe aforementioned I heard a shout of' Yank him in,'and this drew my attention to a lunge of less than a yard in length pully-haulied over the gunwale of the canoe. The captor, I noticed, had jerked his line to and fro, and struck with terrific force. An ordinary fish would have been decapitated, but the lunge (apparently

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about 7 lb.) shot out of water like a trout before it came in hand over hand. It was not encouraging to be informed that, although this man knew the water and the methods of catching the fish, this was his only sport during an excursion of three or four hours.

I forgave the boatman's sneers at my toy tackle, as he was good enough to term it, for we had not been long afloat before I was persuaded that if these Canadian anglers intend to make bags, their rude fashion is the best. Yet I would have liked a fair opportunity of practising here the spinning to which we are accustomed in England. Having to sit so still and being unable to move, the triangles of my phantom were continually hitching in loose weeds, and the constant hauling in of the bait to clear it spoiled the temper and elevated the monotony to the dignity of pain. It was very pretty looking at the beautiful maple woods on the timbered land, and contrasting the green shores with the blue water. The depth was seldom over six or eight feet, but for density and tenacity such forests of subaqueous growths I had never seen.

Determining to stick to the English ways and keep my phantom spinning as near thirty yards behind the boat as I could, I was by-and-by rewarded with a distinct pluck, and the soleskin bait came back curiously mashed and doubled

up, yet

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with the three sets of triangles intact. This was glorious for the boatman, who had prophesied that I was, practically speaking, only playing the fool, and who was now not slow to state in profane vernacular that if the hooks had been of reasonable size I should have caught the fish. Nevertheless the huge spoon which my friend was trailing had caught nothing but weeds, whilst in the course of half an hour I could boast of three abortive runs at the little phantom, and the striking of one small fish about two feet in length, which, lightly hooked, bounded into the air and splashed back to freedom. The encouragement was that the fish were * on the move,' and it began to be apparent that my modest desire of catching a lunge for examination was not so remote a possibility as might be supposed.

We were proceeding midway between the island and the mainland, silent after an interval of talk about sport generally and the ups and downs of colonial life, when my rod top was jerked downwards almost to the water; the winch revolved madly, and the line ran out at speed to cut well into my forefinger. My friend in the stern, surmising from the expression of my countenance that something had happened, with the instinct of a sportsman hauled in his sash line and

coiled it neatly under foot out of the

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scene of action. The boatman looked astonished, but there was no mistaking the whirring scream of the winch. He instinctively turned the boat's head to the shore, shouted directions as to how I was to behave, insisting that we must drag the fish after us. It took me some little time, playing the fish the while and crouching uncomfortably on my miserable little thwart, to explain that his business was to row and leave me to deal with the fish. He at last acquiesced, and abandoned his original intention of rowing an eighth of a mile across the lake to land.

That it was a lunge we soon saw. He had run out some eighty yards of line without a pause. Away in the wake of bright sunshine leaped five or six feet into the air a very splendid form as yellow as gold. At that distance it seemed as if the fish belonged to somebody else and had no connection with my line. It jumped two or three times, and we could hear the loud smack as it tumbled back into the lake. Your British pike rarely leaps out of water. This fish fought most gamely. The boatman observing presently that the line was slack, called Heaven in most insulting terms to witness that the darned fish was off, and that it was just what he had been predicting. The blanked fact, he roared, was that it was a

blooming wrong to the country to go for lunge with such trumpery.

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But it was all in order; the gallant lunge was simply tearing in towards us, and the angler was, as well as he could, with aching shoulders and cramped legs, reeling up to meet the tactics of the game.

Not a little worried by the shouted and quaintly blasphemous directions of the boatman, I fear I had to speak to him with vehemence, and being vigorously bullied he lapsed into sullen silence. It was something gained that he obeyed instead of giving orders. It was something, too, for him to continue rowing; the wind was behind him, the weight of the fish, which was obviously considerable, was very dead against him, and, in addition, there was the weight of the boat to aid the enemy. I may be forgiven, therefore, for opening my mouth and speaking with my tongue in the manner that I did. In a word, the boatman eventually comprehended my plan of campaign, realising, moreover, that here was a fish to humour to the top of its bent. He intelligently backed water and manoeuvred the canoe during the quarter of an hour or so of glorious battle that remained. We estimated the fish, from its appearance while flashing its golden aerial somersaults, at not less than 15 lb.

It was a good fight, though it would have been much shorter could I have stood up fair and square— even kneeling would have been a modest sort of corn-

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promise. But I had to sit tight, with wrists, arms, back, and shoulders strained and aching by the efforts to keep the taut line free of the canoe. Everything held firm, and, all told, there was a merry half hour between the first leap and the end. For I may here remark, in the light of subsequent experience, that the lunge is a gamer fish than the pike, while its invariable habit of leaping out of the water adds greatly to the sport. To return to our particular fish, little by little the rod was shortened and the triumph of rod and line was complete. How sincerely did I welcome the great shining bronze back when it wallowed on the surface only a few yards from the canoe Yet it seemed that the real difficulty was now to begin.

It was a bigger fish than we had supposed, and my friend in the stern had never used a gaff. The boatman behind me was occupied with his oars, and had it been otherwise my small rod could not have brought the fish up to him. The gaff, according to the custom of the country, was rankly barbed, and it proved our salvation. The handle, wrongly tapered, was smallest at the end where it ought to have afforded a

grip to the hand; and when my friend thrust the coarse barbed meat-hook firmly into the fish, having had no experience of the strength of such customers, the handle slipped out of his hand at

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the heavy plunge. Off the fish went, therefore, with the added weight of the wood and steel stick-fast. It was verily a painful five minutes that succeeded; fortunately, the tension of the line had not been relaxed for an instant, and my friend remained cool. The boatman peremptorily ordered him to seize the so-and-so line, but the good fellow listened to my yell of protest rather than to the orders of the captain of the ship. I bade him take his chance to lay hold of the gaff, and, having it, to hold on grimly. And so it happened.; when the plunging fish came his way, with the gaff upraised like a small mast from the carcase, he gripped the handle and hoisted the lunge, fighting fiercely, out of water and deposited it among our feet, where in the confined space there ensued amazing confusion until I knelt upon the creature. Then we gave the lunge its coup de grdce with a stretcher, and for a little time looked at one another contentedly and recovered breath.

The odds had been really throughout against us. The fish had been hooked far down the throat by one triangle of the small

phantom, and this was dislodged by the settling blow. The delight of the now converted boatman was edifying. He was profuse irt his apologies for having made light of the rod and line and my English method, and above all for

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attempting to interfere and issue directions. He frankly explained that he had never seen the like before in lunge fishing, but that he would adopt the system as soon as he could properly equip himself.

The prize was exactly four feet long, and was so empty that it seemed to corroborate the Indian legend as to the fish not feeding at that period. It had, however, taken the bait, and if it had shed any of its teeth the armoury must have been a very fearful one, for both in his large and small teeth he could give our pike many points. It was the narrowest fish I had ever seen for the length, except ling or hake. It weighed only 24^ lb., and from its length and the fact that its head was n| in. from the outer edge of the gill cover to the tip of the lower snout, it should have been considerably over 30 lb.

I gathered from the sensation made in the little town when we landed at the wharf that, notwithstanding the loose talk about 40-pounders, some time must have elapsed since a lunge of this size had been seen. The boatman flourished it in

triumph as we walked in procession across the dusty road from the landing stage to the hotel verandah, and when the news spread, as it seemed to do miraculously, that a big lunge had been caught on a small rod and trout-line, there was quite a popular movement. Men left their

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horses and buggies, workpeople threw down their tools and hurried to the scene, mothers caught their children in their arms and held them up to see the sight. We went out again in the afternoon, when I killed a lunge of about 6 lb., and that too had an absolutely empty stomach.

The captain of the steamer which brought me home said that he once conveyed from the St. Lawrence the head of a lunge that had kicked the beam at 140 lb. I can easily imagine that with proper boat, tackle, and baits a hundredweight would be a very moderate bag for the angler who would be content with the maskinong^, pike, or pickerel of these lakes.

On the general subject of the pike's foreign relatives it may be added that there is a fish in America called the wall-eyed pike, which is the pike-perch known as the zander or zanda in Germany and Austria, and by other names in Denmark, Sweden, and Russia. It is a lake fish, much esteemed for food in the markets of the eastern cities.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE SPINNING BAIT AND ITS TACKLE By JOHN BICKERDYK^

I am inclined to think that the largest fish are more often caught by spinning than by any other method. In extensive sheets of water it is unquestionably the most deadly method of pike fishing. No doubt if the records of a season were examined it would be found that more pike had been killed on paternosters and other forms of live-bait tackle than on the spinning rod, because for one angler who spins, twenty or more use live-bait tackle owing to its easier manipulation. But if one could arrive at the exact numbers of spinners and live-baiters and the fish killed by them, then I feel quite sure that the spinners would be found to have had proportionately the better sport of the two. At the same time, to say that spinning is always the best method of pike fishing, and that all other methods are unsportsmanlike, as I have sometimes heard stated, is nonsense.

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In a little weedy piece of water, where fishing is only possible in small open spaces in the aquatic vegetation, the paternoster or snap-trolling tackle must be used; spinning, under such conditions, is out of the question. Or if we find ourselves by a very small river, or a piece of ornamental water not more than, say, a quarter of an acre in extent, then, unless our time is very limited, it is better to live-bait with float tackle or paternoster than to spin, for a small piece of water is so soon spun over. In any place where the weeds would interfere with the use of spinning tackle, or it is desirable to fish patiently for some time in a limited space, spinning is decidedly a mistake. At the same time, if, after working live-bait for the greater part of the day, we meet with no success, it is certainly desirable to try the experiment of covering the water with the spinning bait before giving up in despair, one example of which is given in an earlier chapter. In small lakes it sometimes happens that pike take spinning baits much more readily than live-baits, and two notable instances of this occur to me.

I was fishing some years ago in private water in Ireland. It was a delightful spot; a small reedy lake surrounded by woodlands, nestled in the hollow of the hills, and the bright green lawn of my friend's

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house trended down to the edge of the water. The centre of the lake was filled up with a large reed bed, and my friend, though an enthusiastic sportsman, never allowed a gun to be fired anywhere near it. The result was that wild-fowl of all descriptions came there and increased amazingly. With great trouble I had brought a few live-baits up to the lake, and began the day by using one on float tackle, but failed to get a run. Finally, I threw out the tackle in a likely corner, laid my rod on the bank, and started spinning from a boat, using as bait a ragged old red phantom which had proved successful in a very much larger lake in the neighbourhood. With this I soon took several good fish, and quite retrieved the misfortunes of the morning; and all the while my live-bait, which was swimming about in one of the pikiest corners of the water, remained untouched. I thought that perhaps this was merely one of those curious coincidences which often happen to anglers, and that no general conclusions should be drawn; but I learned from my friends that they nearly always found spinning to be the best way of catching fish out of that particular piece of water.

Some years later I went to fish a lake in the Midlands. It was ■ many acres in extent, and in ancient times had been the means of providing a

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little settlement of monks with fish on fast days. The old religious establishment had long since disappeared ; in its place had been built a large country house, and this was, in time, deserted by its owner and turned into a charitable institution. Now, alas ! the lake itself has vanished, the waters having drained down into the workings of a large colliery. I was told that the best way of fishing it was with the paternoster, and my friend would supply me with plenty of small live gudgeon for the purpose.

There was a punt on the water, and, true to promise, in a fish-box near it an abundance of lively little baits. I commenced by paternostering in all the most likely spots, but at the end of two hours had only caught one fish so small that I returned it to the water; and all this time I could see, by the movements of the rudd with which the lake abounded, that the pike were feeding eagerly round the sides in shallow water. Feeling confident that I was not making the best of my opportunities, I took off the paternoster and put up some very light spinning tackle, mounting a small gudgeon on a proportionately small Chapman spinner. Then, and not till then, fortune smiled on me, and I began to catch pike faster, I think, than I had ever -caught them in my life before. They were not large fish, and I returned

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most of them to the water, just measuring them along the gunwale of the punt before I did so. At the end of the day I found that I had caught thirty-five feet of pike. A friend with me who was live-baiting ran very few fish.

One particular advantage I had in using spinning tackle was that I showed my bait to at least ten times as many fish as if I had been paternostering. If the pike had been sulky and more or less off the feed, then possibly the paternoster might have been the better tackle, assuming I could have been certain of the position of a few fish. In that case I might also have obtained some results by suspending a live-bait over their heads by means of a float, and waiting patiently until the temptation became too strong for them to resist. For the waiting game, the float, paternoster, or ledger must be used; but for the capture of feeding fish there is nothing like a spinning bait, particularly if there is a ripple on the surface or some colour in the water.

The largest pike I ever caught in my life was in Lough Derg, on spinning tackle, the bait being one of some bleak which I

had caught in the Thames years before, preserved in spirits of wine, and brought over with me in a pickle bottle.

Two out of three of the largest fish I ever hooked

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in the Thames came at a spinning bait, but I had the misfortune to lose them both. I was fishing near Weybridge one winter, cast my spinning tackle across the river to the edge of a reed bed, and clearly saw a huge fish come out from among the reeds and seize it He stayed sullenly close to the top of the water for a moment or two, and I could see his wicked eye and every mark on his long green and yellow body. There was no great strain to speak of on the line, but suddenly the gimp went close to the bait and I have no doubt was cut between his powerful jaws. With the second fish I was even more unfortunate. My rod, an old favourite which I ought long before to have discarded, broke in half when I struck. Within a month of this misfortune a professional fisherman caught an exceedingly big jack, well over 20 lb., in the same corner. Very possibly it was my fish.

But spinning, to be successful, must be properly carried out. A man who fishes 'a little,' if offered a day on a friend's water, as likely as not goes into a tackle shop and asks for a trace. He is given one much thicker than it ought to be, with

three or four swivels dotted about it at even intervals. Strung in the middle of it is a pipe lead of considerable weight. He next asks for something new in pike baits, and

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is given a painted tin monstrosity, or possibly a new form of spoon bait. Armed with this and a line strong enough to hold a 60-lb. salmon, he goes down to his friend's water some sunny day in October, gets caught up in weeds, finds that his line kinks, the numerous swivels notwithstanding, and feels immensely proud of himself if at the close of the day he has a brace of fish weighing 4 or 5 lb. each. Spinning carried out on these lines is certainly not so successful as live-baiting.

Looking back some twenty-six years, it seems to me that the description of the day on which I first cast a spinning bait would be an excellent illustration of the art of how not to do it Our family were at Bournemouth one winter, and an elder brother and myself determined to catch pike in the Avon at Ringwood. My brother was very well fitted up in the matter of tackle. I had nothing beyond an eight-plait tanned hemp line and a very antiquated wooden reel, which was, in fact, nothing more than a wooden spool revolving on a spindle. I searched about the town for a rod, but could only get a poor thing of bamboo suitable for roach fishing. But I took the little rings off it, bought some wire at the ironmonger's, and

bound on some big upright rings. We had been told we could get tackle in Ringwood at the post

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office, so we called there on our way to the water, and I bought a flight consisting of three huge triangles and a lip-hook on enormously coarse gimp, and a spinning trace quite strong enough for shark fishing. The lead, I remember, was close to the lip-hook.

When we reached the water we found that the bailiff had no proper spinning baits, only some rather large roach. What my brother did I hardly remember; I know he caught a few good fish. But the first time a pike seized my wobbling roach, the little bamboo rod broke in the middle. Laying the broken ends one over the other, I bound them up with a piece of line and made a fresh start. Then my line began to kink, for the clumsy swivels on the trace worked badly, and the lead was not hung below the level of the line, as it ought to have been. This caused me to cast from the reel—a thing I had never heard of in those days, though doubtless it was even then well known to the Trent anglers—and very bungling casts I made.

At that time the river swarmed with fish, and we found them well on the feed. But it was no easy matter for me to catch

them, for my huge hooks required an enormously powerful strike to get any of them in over the barb, while my rod was so light that if I struck hard it was certain to smash again.

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Being thus between Scylla and Charybdis I lost many fish. At one place, I remember, it seemed as if a shoal of ravening pike was searching for food. I cast right across the river and a fish seized the bait; I struck too gently, and simply pulled the roach out of his mouth. Immediately another pike rose up (I saw them both at once) and took the bait. This one I also lost, and before the tackle had been wound up to the punt a third fish was on, but I did not catch one of the trio.

Even now I lament over that day's fishing, for such opportunities of sport have become rare; pike fishers are more numerous, pike are more scarce. If I had been furnished with a strong little spinning rod with which I could have struck properly, if the lead had been hung below the centre of the line, which would have prevented kinking, and if the hooks had been smaller and less numerous, we should have had a mighty take of fish from the most excellent of New Forest rivers. Harking back to the question of live-bait and spinners, I remember that during lunch we put out a live-bait and did not have a run.

As to which is the best form of spinning tackle there is some difference of opinion among skilled pike fishermen. Probably the truth is that several kinds of flights are equally good. I remember asking

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a doctor once why he did not try a certain medicine which I knew to be an excellent remedy. He replied that he did not question the beneficial effects to be obtained from the use of the drug, but that most doctors made it their rule to give only the medicines with which they were well acquainted and the effects of which they had watched on many patients. Thus one doctor might be giving one set of drugs and another treating his patients in an entirely different way, and in both cases the result might be the same. So it is with those who spin for pike. Each has his own little fads and fancies in fishing tackle, and by constantly using certain methods he becomes expert in them. The result is that at the end of the season those two good pike fishers, Jones and Smith, find that they have been equally successful, though one invariably uses a Chapman spinner and the other detests anything in the shape of fans at the head of a bait and swears by the Bromley-Pennell flight.

The tackle which I personally prefer to all others, though I am not so bigoted as to say it is the best, consists of a

Chapman spinner with silver-plated fans, and the hooks mounted on white gimp; above the spinner some six inches of fine stained gimp, and above this a trace of not-too-stout salmon-gut tied with buffer knots. The lead is to be slung on

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and below the trace to prevent the line twisting above it, and may be any of the long slender leads which take this position. Immediately below the lead I have a double swivel and no others. Swivels should be of brass and always kept well oiled.

Chapman spinners I always endeavour to have in several sizes, using the smallest one which will satisfactorily spin any particular bait. Now that preserved baits are so much used a Chapman spinner is particularly useful, for unless glycerine is mixed with the preservative the baits get very tough and stiff, and will not curve nicely. I attach great importance to having every part of the tackle in due proportion to the rest. If a very small bait is used, then the hooks must be small, the fans at the head of the spinner small, the gimp fine, and gut of medium thickness. If a rather large bait has to be trailed, as is the case in some of the big Irish or Scotch lakes, then the line and trace must be stout, the hooks fairly big, and the rod strong, for with a big bait heavy striking is necessary if we are to get the hooks away

from the bait into the pike's mouth.

There are several excellent new forms of Chapman spinners intended to hold the bait well up to the fans, but I do not know that one catches more pike with them than with the old pattern, the fans, of

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which, if the tackle is so mounted that the pull is on the hooks and not on the spike (and how this is done is illustrated both in Francis Francis's 'Book on Angling' and my ' Book of the All-round Angler'), keep their position, and no transverse. spikes or similar arrangements are required.

The old-fashioned pike rod was a very clumsy and heavy instrument. It was almost invariably made of solid wood and approximated in girth, length and weight to a hop-pole. I am inclined to think that th£ modern tendency is to run too much to the other extreme. Dainty little striplings are sold under the name of pike rods which would be quite useless to hold a really big and powerful fish out of the weeds. There are now, sad to relate, many waters in which there are no big pike, and for such waters a light rod is, of course, suitable. But for pike fishing generally I do not think the rod should be less than 11 ft. 6 in. in length, and should certainly be powerful and stiff rather than lissom. As to the material of

which it is composed, the angler has his choice of hickory, greenheart, whole cane, built-up cane, and composite rods. The most popular rod of all is one of East India cane with a greenheart top, and I hr.ve seen an excellent rod made with a deal butt, whole-cane middle-joint, and greenheart top. Split-cane rods

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are very beautiful weapons and exceedingly strong, but they are somewhat delicate for winter use. None the less, if expense is no object, a good built-up cane rod is the one I should choose. Whatever rod we decide on should be fitted with several top-joints of different lengths, for with a light bait and fine tackle the top, at least, should be more lissom than when we are using stout tackle and big baits, and have to strike hard.

The rings of a spinning rod are of considerable importance. The best are known as bridge-rings; these are upright, should be large, and give infinitely better results for spinning purposes if fitted with a nicely-smoothed interior ring of phosphor-bronze. Snake rings are good, but it is always desirable to have a bridge-ring on the butt. The phosphor-bronze rings are held in position by a groove on their outer edge, and if a little oil is put in this groove from time to time they are easily turned round, so that when one portion begins

to wear the line can be made to run over another part of the metal. For the top-ring I have never found anything answer better than one I invented some years ago, which works on pivots and adapts itself to whatever angle the line makes to the rod. Whatever top-ring is used should be fitted with an interior ring of phosphor-bronze. Fixed

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rings should be set at right angles to the rod. When buying a rod it is as well to see that the winch-fittings will take one's reel, for it is a common practice of rod-makers to make them too short for the reel plate. If the rod is fitted with what are called Universal or Weeger winch-fittings, almost any sized reel can be used without breaking a penknife in an endeavour to increase the length of the slot in the butt.

The spinning rod, like that used for fly fishing, should be fitted with ferrules which will not allow the joints to throw out. I like nothing so well as the American so-called suction ferrules, which are fitted so truly that when they are drawn apart they make a noise like a pop-gun. English tackle-makers, however, do not succeed very well with these ferrules, but introduce many little dodges to hold the joints together. Of these, lockfast joints are perhaps the best. They require to be kept greased, as indeed do all ferrules. It is important that ferrules should be strengthened round the edge

with a small rim or band of metal. A good spinning rod is worthy of careful attention; it should be sandpapered and revarnished from time to time and the bindings renewed. It should never be put away in a damp case, and should be hung up by means of a loop when not in use.

It is certainly a sound policy to purchase a good

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reel, and of reels those of the Nottingham type are the best. Nowadays these are almost invariably made with a check, so that there is no danger of over-running, and there are several forms of line-guards which prevent the line uncoiling off the barrel and twisting round the neck of the reel. I designed a simple little thing of wire, which any blacksmith or ironmonger can make and fix on the reel at the cost of a few pence. The best Nottingham reels are now made of ebonite, German silver, or aluminium. The diameter for pike fishing should not be less than four inches, five inches being better.

For spinning tackle good hooks are of the first importance. I have lost many a fine pike owing to hooks which were made of soft metal and bent, or were badly tempered and snapped, or were so ill formed that it was next to impossible to drag them into the mouth of the fish. There is nothing better for pike fishing than square-bent hooks with the point parallel

with the shank. The penetration of these is good, and one loses few fish with them. Their temper can always be ascertained by the simple test of bending them outwards. If they snap they are over-tempered; if they remain bent outwards they are under-tempered, and in both cases should be rejected. The good hook should stand a reason-

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able amount of bending and recover its shape. The points of hooks are very apt to get broken off by coming in contact not only with the bony jaws of big pike, but with stones at the bottom of the river. The flight should therefore be examined from time to time, and a watchmaker's file—a little thing which is easily carried in the waistcoat pocket—should be used to bring up the points to a satisfactory degree of fineness and sharpness.

I would strongly recommend all those who practise pike fishing to learn how to tie on a hook and make a loop at the end of a piece of gimp. It is no mysterious matter, and simply consists in being able to wax a piece of stout sewing-machine silk with either bees' wax or cobbler's wax, and then bind it carefully round the gimp or hook shank, as the case may be. The finishing-off is the only difficulty. This it is impossible to explain without a diagram, but there are many fishermen who will show a brother angler how it is done;

and if these good friends are not forthcoming, there are modern books on practical angling which contain very full particulars. When once the ability to do a little piece of binding has been acquired, it is in the power of the angler to make up his own traces, flights, and the like, an extremely useful accomplishment in out-of-the-way

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places where big pike may be hooked, such as the wilds of Ireland or Sweden.

One of the great charms of spinning is that, thanks to sundry preservatives, one is independent of any bait catching. When live-baiting for jack, it is a common experience to get an invitation to fish some water, with the assurance that there is no necessity to bring any bait, because Tom and Dick, the owner's sons, will go down to the lake overnight or early in the morning and catch a canful of them. It invaribly happens that Tom and Dick either go ferreting or oversleep themselves, or the little fish will not bite. The unfortunate pike fisherman then has to hunt up the coachman to get some bran, make up ground bait, and spend half the morning in catching a few small roach or rudd.

For a good many years now a few fishermen have been using natural spinning baits which have been preserved in

methylated spirit; but the comparatively recent introduction of formalin, or formic aldehyde, for this purpose has made the preserved bait exceedingly popular, not only for pike, but also for trout and salmon. Very fine minnows, gudgeon, dace, sprats —all are now obtainable at the tackle-shops, nicely put up in wide-mouthed bottles, and as bright and natural looking as if they had been caught the day

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before. Formalin not only preserves baits, but it tans and toughens them, which is a decided advantage. It is a gaseous body obtained by the slow oxidation of methylated alcohol, and is sold mixed with water in various strengths, but never, I believe, more than a 40 per cent, solution. This strength is unnecessarily strong for bait preservation, and it is usual to dilute it down considerably.

All baits, sprats in particular, give off a considerable amount of grease and watery matter when first placed in either spirits or formalin solution, and to obtain satisfactory results it is desirable to put them into a fresh bottle of the mixture at the end of a week or ten days. If they are going to be used in the course of a day or two, this is not necessary. Formalin is such a new preservative, ! so far as baits are concerned, that the best strength has not yet been exactly ascertained, but it is generally believed that a 10 per cent, solution will answer

every purpose, and that a

1 I have not succeeded particularly well with baits preserved in formalin, and have recently met several anglers who hold the opinion that fish do not like baits so prepared, preferring even those which have been kept in evil-smelling methylated spirit. At present the evidence for or against the new preservative is not sufficient to enable me to form a very definite opinion. It certainly keeps the baits well and toughens them, and there is little or no smell with it.—J. B.

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5 or even 2 per cent, will do. The stronger it is the more the fish are toughened, and the harder and stiffer they get. After having been in formalin for some time they may be taken out and kept for a day or two out of the liquid, which is a great convenience, obviating the necessity of carrying a glass bottle when out fishing. Any baits that are not used can be returned to the bottle in the evening, at the close of the expedition.

Those who use ordinary spinning flights without fans—flights in which the spin is obtained by curving the tail of the bait—will be well advised to add a little glycerine to their formalin solution, about a tablespoonful or a little more to the pint. This not only helps to preserve the baits, but softens

them considerably. Where formalin is not obtainable, methylated spirit answers extremely well ; and though the baits smell vilely of naphtha the fish do not seem to mind it. As I have said on an earlier page, I caught the largest pike of my life on a Thames bleak which had been some years in methylated spirit; and with a companion bait whose duration of pickledom had been as great, I caught a 5-lb. trout. At the same time, I certainly do not recommend baits which have been in methylated spirit for trout fishing. Baits can, of course, be preserved in

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any spirit {e.g. whisky), but methylated alcohol is usually chosen as being cheap. It is made from pure alcohol by the addition of wood-naphtha to make it taste nasty and prevent people drinking it, and thus mixed it is free of duty and is used in the arts.

Another method of preserving baits is to place them in a bottle of glycerine, and still another is to salt them; but pickling makes them soft and unsuitable for spinning. A salted minnow, by the way, is believed to be great medicine for big trout by some fishermen. Boracic acid, which, like formalin, is used for preserving various foodstuffs and poisoning the community, can also be utilised as a preservative for baits.

With regard to the art of using all these excellent tackles and carefully prepared baits, while the best methods can certainly be described in writing, skill can only be acquired by practice. The particular points to be aimed at, especially in summer, are to cast the bait with a reasonable amount of accuracy, and to exercise judgment as to the depth at which it spins. It must be confessed that spinning is somewhat wearying work when the fish are not inclined to feed. It is, in fact, more trying to the back than salmon fishing. When the knack has been acquired,

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the casting out can be done without much effort if the rod and tackle are right; but the slight stoop which most anglers adopt when hauling in the line yard by yard is apt to try the back of those past middle age somewhat severely.

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CHAPTER IX

MODERN METHODS OF SPINNING By JOHN BICKERDYKE

Broadly speaking, there are two methods of casting. In one,

line sufficient for the purpose is drawn off the reel and either let fall on the ground or crumpled up in the hand; in the other, the cast is made directly off tne reel, after the manner of the Trent fishermen. The well-known Malloch reel may also be used, but it is not much favoured by pike spinners, though frequently seen in the hands of salmon fishers when working the prawn or phantom. I would strongly recommend any reader who turns to these pages for instruction, to adopt one method and stick to it. Those who fish mostly from the bank would be certainly well advised to learn the Trent method, though it is a little more difficult than the one I have first mentioned, which may be termed the Thames style.

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The Thames being a big river, most of the fishing is done from a punt, and the line, which is drawn from the reel, lies either on the floor or the till of the little craft. But when fishing from the bank, if we allow the line to fall at our feet it is sure to get caught in the seed heads of the grass, or, if it escapes this danger, to pick up pieces of twig, dead leaves, or other unconsidered trifles. Thus, instead of the bait flying out boldly some forty yards and dropping gently on to the water, it is checked half-way, brought back a yard or two, falls with an ugly splash, and there is a confused entanglement necessitating the delay of half a minute or so during which the bait sinks to the bottom, where very likely the hooks get foul of some stone, weed, or snag. Some Thames fishermen have a very clever knack of gathering up the line in the palm of the hand, but it is difficult to do this with sufficient rapidity except where there is a fair stream which assists in spinning the bait. When the cast is a short one, a few yards of line can be held in coils as they are drawn in.

With a bait which spins really well one can hardly spin too slowly, and the fisherman should, generally speaking, aim at keeping his tackle about two-thirds of the way from the surface, except in very deep water, when four to five feet from the bottom is

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a good depth. If he is fishing deep water, and keeps his bait too high, pike lying among the weeds probably do not see it, or, if they do get a glimpse of it, regard it as too distant an object to pursue. If, on the other hand, it is spun too deep, it is only brought within the vision of those fish which are lying immediately under it. If the water is somewhat thick, then the bait should be allowed to sink well before the line is wound or drawn in, or a heavier lead can be used. It is obviously all-important that as many pike as possible should see the bait, and we should always keep this point well in mind.

Not a few Thames fishermen claim that their particular method is more deadly than spinning from the reel, because the drawing in of the line with the hand gives the bait an irregular movement which is considered to be more attractive to the pike than the steady spin which results when the line is wound in on the reel. But as the most deadly method of spinning, if it may be so termed, is to trail a spinning-bait behind a boat which is rowed very steadily along, I do not think there is much in this contention. As for myself, I usually adopt the Thames method when fishing from a punt, and cast from the reel when spinning from the bank. I find I can cast with greater accuracy by the Thames method, and it

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requires slightly less labour to draw in the line with the hand than to reel up every time. As a rule I cast neither up stream nor down, but across, and rather down than up. I always allow my bait to sink sufficiently—and here the personal equation comes in—before commencing to spin it, and to spin slowly and steadily.

Some men believe that a wobbly bait is more attractive to the pike than one which spins in a straight line. I must say I have little faith in the wobble. In waters which are little fished, pike take a bait whether it wobbles or not; but in these times of piscine education the straight spin is preferable. A few years ago trailing used to be allowed on the Thames, and almost everyone who went out fishing in a punt used to trail a spinning-bait astern on the way to the fishing ground. Many pike were caught in this way, far more than by spinning proper, and the Thames professional fishermen, who were masters of the craft, agreed without exception that the bait should spin well and without a wobble. In fact, a man who did not make his bait spin straight was regarded as a bungler.

Spinning from the reel is a most artistic proceeding. A Nottingham winch is requisite; that is to say, one with rather a large barrel, and so carefully

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made that it revolves freely. Most of these reels have an optional check which, by touching a button, can be brought into use when a fish is hooked. One modern improvement in checks on reels is to have the double spring made with unequal powers. In the ordinary check, I should explain, there are two springs, one which acts as the fish runs the line off the reel, the other coming into use as the line is reeled in. As there is no reason why the hand should be checked when the line is being wound up, the winding-in check-spring is made as light as possible, while the check-spring on the out-going line is made of sufficient strength to put the required pressure on the fish. As I have explained, by merely moving a button the check can be taken off altogether and the reel allowed to run quite freely for casting purposes.

An important point which not every pike fisher is aware of, is the effect the weight of a large barrel has on accurate casting. Once a heavy reel has been set in motion, it gains impetus and usually revolves too freely, but the effort of starting it is apt to check the bait, which is likely to swing round and go in a somewhat different direction to that which the angler aimed at. If a man always fishes with one particular reel, and always uses a spinning bait and rod of the

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same weight, he gets used to their peculiarities and makes due allowance for this; but if, as is usually the case, the size of the bait and the rod used vary from time to time, then it is best to have a reel as light as possible—in other words, one which can be easily set in motion. The lightest reel I have yet seen is the Ariel, the barrel of which is a mere skeleton and revolves so readily that it can be blown round. A reel with a light barrel of this kind hardly checks a bait at the commencement of its outward course, and is less likely to over-run than one with a heavy barrel. A reel of large diameter is the best for winding in the line, but, if it is heavy, quite the worst for casting out the bait. These Ariel reels, however, are so light that they can be used of considerable diameter. The only objection I can find to them is that they are not quite so strong as a reel should be for a big fish, and they certainly require to be fitted with a line-guard of some kind or other.

In casting from the reel, the pike fisher grasps the rod with both hands, one above the reel and one below; and as he swings the rod round, checks the reel by either the first finger of the hand below it or the little finger of the hand above it. Then, as the cast proceeds, the reel is released, spins round at

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great speed, and (as the pace of the bait through the air begins to slacken) should be gently checked with the finger, or it will certainly over-run. As the bait touches the water, the reel must be stopped altogether. These are practically the only directions which can be given in writing, but if they are acted upon, an hour or two's patient practice with this admirable form of spinning gear will enable the would-be pike spinner to give a very good account of himself.

How a pike should be struck is a matter which has been much discussed, and on which there is even now a considerable difference of opinion. One authority advises his readers to strike and strike again until the pike begins to plunge and show oy its motions that it feels it is hooked. Another advises that there should be one good hard strike. A third, that there should be no strike, but a long, drawing pull, and plenty of pressure put upon the fish to force in the hook. As a matter of fact there is no general rule to be laid down, unless it is that the strike or the strain put on after striking should be sufficient to get one or more of the hooks into the fish's mouth. Before a cast is made glance at your tackle, notice how many hooks there are on it, whether they are large or small, and the size of the bait. If a flight is used on which there are four or five large triangles,

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then the strike must be heavy indeed; and it is in that case no use to have fine gimp, for it would most certainly get broken before those big hooks could be driven into the fish's mouth. It should be borne in mind that it takes exactly double as much force to make two hooks penetrate as it does to get one in. If there are three triangles in a pike's mouth, and the points of three or more hooks are sticking against his flesh, then at least three times as much force is requisite as if the point of one hook only were pressing against his jaw. Moreover, it requires more force to make a big hook penetrate than a small one.

With the small baits and triangle that I frequently use in rivers, I do not find that a very heavy strike is necessary; but with the old-fashioned Thames flights, made up of three or four triangles, one used constantly to lose fish by not striking hard enough. In short, the strike is a matter of judgment. The angler must be guided by the tackle he is using* and also by the length of line he has out; for a silk line is more or less elastic and yielding, so that one has to strike much harder if the bait is twenty or thirty yards from the end of the rod, than if it is close at hand.

Spinning in its details varies a good deal according to the time of year and the water. On rivers in

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summer and early autumn spinning the runs between weeds, by the sides of rushes and reed beds, and in all and sundry nooks and corners, is a very pretty and interesting method of fishing, requiring a good deal of personal skill on the part of the angler. During the heat of the day, in the blazing sunshine, it is not to be recommended; but soon after sunrise and during the hour after sunset, and at any time when the day is cloudy and windy, there are fish to be caught by those who can cast with accuracy.

In late autumn and winter, when the weeds have disappeared, spinning becomes a comparatively simple matter; but the angler should know his water. He must remember where the reed-beds have been, where the water-lilies with their spreading green leaves have decked the shining surface, for until the floods come the pike still linger near their summer haunts. In medium-sized or small rivers the deeper reaches and pools may be spun down systematically, without regard to reed-beds or weeds; and after floods and when the temperature becomes low, the deep holes and the eddies should be carefully searched.

On small lakes the pike spinner will, without advice to that effect being tendered, fish near reed-beds and weeds. He should bear in mind that pike when feeding will leave the deeps and come on to

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the shallows near the edges, where their food, in the shape of small rudd, roach, and perch, is to be found.

There is a peculiar class of small pike-waters which often swarm with fish and are extremely difficult to work with spinning tackle. These are either very shallow or, if deep, have a growth all over them of weeds coming within a foot of the surface. For such places we must make our tackle as light as possible. If the Chapman spinner is used there should be no lead on the spike, and the lead on the trace should be reduced to a minimum size, but flattened out a little with a hammer to prevent the trace revolving above the swivels and kinking the line. The spinning will have to be done rather rapidly to prevent the bait sinking among the weeds.

An old friend of mine, who fished Strathfieldsaye many years ago, astonished the Duke of Wellington by using on his trace a slender float, which effectually kept the bait from sinking, though no doubt it considerably surprised the pike of those classic but weedy waters. As a matter of fact, in many lakes, if such tackle were used, the pike would be as likely to seize the float as the bait. A Shannon fisherman told me how he was once working an otter-board and a set of pike-flies, when a huge fish seized the.board, carried

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it to the bottom and held it there for some minutes. I have no doubt that the tale may be regarded as true if we substitute seconds for minutes.

Spinning in very big lakes degenerates, as a rule, into trailing, or, as it is more often termed in Ireland and Scotland, trolling; this, I should mention, is not to be confounded with trolling with the dead gorge as understood in England. In immense sheets of water, provided the tackle and baits are right, far more depends on the skill of the boatman than on the efforts of the angler, for the boat has to be rowed quietly and steadily, and on such a course that the bait is brought as closely as possible to weeds and reeds. I never feel confident that I am doing my best on a big lake unless my bait catches in the weeds four or five times in an hour. It is a vexatious thing to have to wind up and clear the triangles, but unless the weed-beds are most systematically worked very few pike will be caught Now and again, of course, pike range about in the open, and occasionally are found feeding close to the surface ; but, generally speaking, they lurk in the weeds, and the bait should be spun five or six feet from the bottom.

I have often thought that in this big-lake fishing we might take a leaf out of the sea-fisher's book and

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use long snoods 1 ; or, to put it in the language of fresh-water, have the lead on our trace very much farther from the bait than is at present the case. I am quite sure this would lead to increased catches, particularly when trout and salmon fishing. The sea-fisherman thinks nothing of placing his lead ten yards from the bait. This we could not do if using a rod, for when a fish was hooked we should reel up until the lead caught in the top-ring, and then find it impossible to bring the fish within reach of the landing-net or gaff. But if we are using a twelve-foot rod, the lead might certainly be put fourteen feet from the bait. It is an experiment well worth trying in any large lake where fish are shy, and generally in clear, smooth water and bright weather.

Trailing on rivers, though it leads to the capture of a good many fish, is usually condemned as unsportsmanlike, and is prohibited on the Thames and Lea. The prohibition is still regarded as a grievance by the bargees, many of whom used to capture pike by trailing a bait astern as their lumbering but picturesque craft were slowly towed up-stream. I

1 By a singular coincidence, only a few weeks after writing this, I came upon professional fishermen on Lough Corrib using hand trolling lines, in which the lead was placed several fathoms from the bait.—J. B.

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heard recently, however, of a certain barge which, it was noticed, constantly towed a child's toy cutter after it. It was supposed that this was done to amuse the bargeman's children who were on board. One day the little craft was seen to capsize and to 'behave in a somewhat eccentric manner; and the watcher discovered that astern of it were a few yards of line terminating in a spoon-bait, which had attracted a lively little pike of 4 or 5 lb.

Finally, as regards spinning, let me say that it is quite the most sportsmanlike and artistic method of catching pike. The art is easily acquired by anyone possessing an average amount of manual dexterity. But to be a master of it, to have every detail of tackle correct, to be able to pitch a bait to a considerable distance with absolute accuracy, to work the bait at exactly the right depth, to draw it through the water at the correct speed, and to miss no spot likely to contain a fish, requires almost, if not quite, as much skill as does fly-fishing for our over-educated trout of the nineteenth or, shall I say, twentieth century ?

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CHAPTER X

FLOAT-TACKLE AND ITS USES By JOHN BICKERDYKE

Live-baiting for jack when I was a boy was not unlike using a floating trimmer at the end of a rod. I still preserve as curiosities some of the huge gaudily painted floats which were then in common use in company with the double gorge hook, the gimp of which was threaded along the side of the unfortunate little fish by means of a baiting needle. On getting a run when the float had disappeared, the angler waited for five or ten minutes. Then he reeled up, struck, and more often than not found that the jack had left the bait, and that the tackle was securely anchored among the stems of the water-lilies or other weeds. The big float and gorge hook still linger in out-of-the-way corners of the kingdom, and I sometimes see them in provincial tackle-shops ; but the up-to-date angler would scorn to use them, not only because a gorge hook involves the death of every

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jack captured, big or little, but also because with the modern

snap-tackle many more fish are to be caught.

It might be supposed that a jack would at all times much more readily take a live-bait than one which was dead, however skilfully spun or trolled; but when the fish are well on the feed this is not the case, as I have shown in the previous chapter. When the fish are sulky and have to be tempted, then a live-bait often has the advantage, particularly if the water is clear. In fact, for live-baiting with float-tackle I always prefer clear water to coloured, because the bait is brought within the view of a larger number of fish.

There are practically three methods of live-baiting—with the float which suspends the bait in mid-water or a little lower, and permits it to rove; with the paternoster, which anchors the bait near, but not on, the bottom by means of a lead, and is particularly useful for fishing small open spaces between weeds; and lastly, the ledger which moors the bait to the bottom, and, owing to the line being below the vision of the fish, is perhaps the least observable tackle of the three, though it is less used than the two foregoing methods, and is more particularly to be recommended when the fish are exceedingly shy or are found collected in winter-time in small weedless

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spaces at the tails of islands and other eddies. It will be convenient to consider each of these methods in its order.

I have described in the previous chapter the difference between casting out a line in the Thames fashion and the Nottingham method of casting from the reel. In live-baiting with float-tackle the Nottingham method is most convenient in almost all cases. If an extraordinarily long cast has to be made, perhaps the Thames method is to be preferred ; but then precautions will have to be taken to prevent the loose line at the foot of the angler from becoming entangled with anything. Of late years bait-casting competitions have taken place, and enormous casts have been made by placing a piece of waterproof or other material on the ground, and carefully coiling down the line, which must not have a suspicion of a kink in it. In actual fishing, however, such extreme care is hardly ever necessary or possible; but we may, of course, find ourselves placed at the side of a sheet of water, with no boat available, and the best bit of fishing ground lying almost out of reach, rendering a supreme effort desirable if we are to make a bag.

The first difficulty in Nottingham fishing is to prevent the reel over-running, but this is soon

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mastered. The next is to cast accurately, which requires considerable practice and renders it desirable for the pike fisher to stick to. one rod and reel. Much the same rod may be used as for spinning, 11 ft, or n ft. 6 in., the lighter the better so long as it has sufficient strength; rings large and smooth, and two or three tops of different lengths. If we are using very light float-tackle and a small bait, then the longest top is brought into requisition. If, on the other hand, we have a ^-lb. roach and a heavy lead, then the long, light top would be too severely tried, and a shorter one is to be preferred. If the Nottingham reel and method are used, it is not important whether the line be waterproofed or left undressed. The Trent fishers themselves generally use an undressed twisted silk line which is both strong and exceeding fine. For lakes, the backwaters of rivers in winter, and other still waters, they grease a few yards of it with vaseline, deer-fat, or other suitable substance, for the purpose of making it float.

The floating of the line is of considerable importance where the bait has to be left in position for any length of time, for if the line sinks it draws the float back towards the fisherman, prevents the bait roving about, and when the long-wished-for run does come, the- angler has to reel up a lot of line before he can

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get a direct strike on to the fish. I almost invariably grease my line when using float-tackle, the only exception being when fishing from a boat in a stream which keeps the line extended and on the surface. Striking on a slack line is one of the principal causes of an empty creel. Very often, too, a line that sinks will get caught on the bottom between stones, water-lily roots, old stumps, and so forth.

I need hardly say it is not necessary to grease the whole of the line, but merely about twenty yards of it, and the floating of the line is considerably helped by placing on it a fragment of cork two or three yards from the float. The exact position of this supplementary float has to depend on the length of the rod and the depth we are fishing, for if the water is very deep and there is much line below the float, then, if we place a cork any distance up the line, when the fish is brought near the punt it will be found that the cork catches in the top-ring and prevents the fish being reeled up within gaffing distance. One drawback to the undressed lines is that, notwithstanding the greasing they receive, they sooner or later absorb water. When this is the case they should be most carefully and thoroughly dried, for it is of little use adding more grease when the line is very wet. With regard to this drying, if we have a plaited or water-

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proof line, we can simply go into an empty room at the end of the day's fishing, pull the line off the reel and let it fall on the floor, winding it up when dry next morning. But with twisted lines it is not safe to do this, for whenever there has been a strain on them they have a tendency to kink. This does not matter when fishing, for we are working the tackle and playing the fish entirely from the reel. Very convenient winders on which to dry lines are sold in most tackle-shops.

The float now most commonly used for live-baiting is one rather long and slender than pear-shaped, and having a hole down the centre through which passes the line, which is kept in position by a peg. On the whole, I think that red is the best colour for the top of a float. I often use one which is coloured white, and I find that under certain conditions of light, more particularly when the sky is a pearly grey and is reflected on the water, the white float is seen with difficulty. In the late evening, on the other hand when the water looks dark, and particularly under the shadow of trees, white is the best colour. The lower portion of the float, that beneath the water, should be a quiet neutral colour, or dull green.

For the tackle below the float there is nothing better than a two-yard length of salmon-gut, medium

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or stout, according to the size of fish expected, and tied with buffer knots whipped with very fine gut. This should terminate in a small brass hook-swivel immediately above which is a pipe-lead painted a dull green in summer, a pale brown in winter. The gut on which the lead works should be carefully served with silk or thread to prevent fraying. Below the lead should come the snap-tackle on at least one foot of gimp. As a rule the tackles sold in the shops are somewhat skimped in the matter of gimp. I have seen them as short as six inehes, which brings the lead far too near the bait.

As to the very best form of snap-tackle, a great deal depends on the size of the bait to be used. A pike of any size will take the whole of a very small bait into its mouth, and will, as a general rule, be secured on a single hook. For medium-sized baits we require nothing more than two triangles, one of which is placed in the back fin of the bait and the other caught near one of its pectoral or breast fins. This is a tackle which has been strongly recommended by Mr. A. Jardine. Larger baits have to be more carefully armed, and the best tackle I know of is one I worked out some years ago after many careful experiments. The first time I tried it a friend and I took eleven jack in twelve runs, and I was fishing with

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large roach, which are, as a rule, extremely unsatisfactory baits, it being difficult to hook the pike which seize them.

After thinking the matter over, I had come to the conclusion that it was necessary with a large bait to have a triangle on both sides, and that the shoulder of the bait, as well as the middle, required arming. To effect this I made a saddleback tackle with the gimp on one side longer than on the other. A single hook was used to fix the tackle to the back of the fish. On one side hung down the short length of gimp with a triangle at the end of it, while on the other was the longer length of gimp with a triangle which was fixed in the shoulder of the bait. One grave objection, however, I found both to this and to the two-triangle tackle previously mentioned, was that when one struck a pike a hook of the lower triangle was dragged into the bait. To obviate this I reversed one of the hooks and used it to attach the triangle to the bait, so that when the angler struck, the triangle was dragged out of the bait and into the mouth of the pike. I have had this tackle in use now for many years, and it has been adopted and copied by most of the tackle-makers, and is, I believe, generally approved by pike fishermen. I find, however, that men who do not possess much manipulative skill have a little

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difficulty in arranging the tackle to the bait, but this is easily overcome by practice.

With the snap-tackles I have described it is not necessary to give the pike any time. A float may sometimes be drawn under by the efforts of the bait to escape, but once sure that the pike has the bait strike as soon as any slack line there may be has been gathered up. As a rule, I reel up gently until I can just feel the fish, and then strike, putting on as much strain as I dare during the first three or four seconds,

A pike when first hooked will sometimes come to the surface of the water, open his mouth widely, and shake his jaws angrily in the air. When this occurs he should be dealt with very tenderly, the point of the rod should be kept as low as possible, and he should be drawn gently below the surface of the water again. Salmon, trout, and pike all have the nasty habit of jiggering, to use the fisherman's phrase; that is to say, they back in the water, shaking their heads the while, and next to twisting a line round a weed, stone, or old stump there is no better method by which they can rid themselves of the hooks. A jiggering fish requires most careful handling.

A word more as to float-tackle and this portion of my subject is done. Those who do much live-baiting

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should be well provided with leads, floats, and snap-tackle of various sizes; for, as in spinning, every part of one's gear should be in proportion to the other parts. To hang a couple of large triangles on a small bait is to half kill the unfortunate bleak, gudgeon, or dace, and to effectually scare any wideawake pike which would otherwise have been caught. On the other hand, to place very small triangles on a big bait is tempting Providence, and running fish to no purpose.

Live-baiting with float-tackle in summer, particularly from a punt, is lazy, summer-like work. We may drift down the stream letting our floats out twenty or thirty yards ahead of us, keeping them as near to the weed fringe as possible, or we may try bay after bay among the weeds, sending a small dace working round and using all the skill we possess to bring it within sight of any pike which may be lurking among the weeds or water-lilies. Then there are the weirpools to be fished, and here in the more quiet but eddying waters alongside the camp-sheathing, we may pick up a good pike or two. Absolutely dead water is a thing to be avoided, and the earlier it is in the season the more likely are we to find the pike in the streams. Later on in the autumn, when the weeds have rotted, the pike begin to spread them-

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selves and to feed better, and now we must search far and

wide for our fish, but always bearing in mind the spots where grew the weeds in summer.

Finally winter comes with its roaring yellow flood and the pike rod rests awhile on the rack; but when the clearing takes place we may look for the best sport of the year and all the lay-bys and eddies should be fished most carefully. Maybe there is some quiet backwater available which is now full of small fry and not a few jack which take toll of them. I have one such place in my mind, where on a day in late autumn I had no less than twenty-two runs from jack, but this was not until I had taken off my ordinary jack baits and tackle and substituted a single hook and one of the very small roach on which the pike were feeding. I have never before nor since seen such a sight, except in a salmon river. The fish were roving about like a pack of beagles, and each time they dashed through the shoal of roach fry they made a swirl like a big salmon taking a fly. There was no need to make many casts ; it was sufficient to throw out the float in one spot and leave it there. Sooner or later a jack would see the little bait, and dash off with it.

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CHAPTER XI

PATERNOSTERING AND LEDGERING By JOHN

Paternostering for pike has only come into high favour of late years, though, as its monkish name implies, it must be a very ancient institution. Looking through one of those quaint old angling books with faded pages and f-shaped s's, bound in worm-eaten brown leather covers, I came upon a description of a paternoster which was very different to the piece of tackle now so termed, and perhaps explains the origin of the name. Pike fishers were recommended to place a piece of lead at the end of their line, and above it some half-dozen hooks on short links—an angler's rosary. On each hook was to be put a small dead fish, and the apparatus was to be lowered into holes where pike were known to abound, and worked up and down briskly, thus giving the baits the semblance of life. Fish in

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Roman Catholic England were so necessary for fast days, and so difficult to get, that one can well imagine some common-sense Abbot excusing his monks the telling of so many paternosters provided they brought in a goodly pike or two on Thursday night before vespers—a pleasant form of penance. It is a somewhat singular fact that the baton, or short cudgel, used to perform the last offices for captured fish is still called the ' priest/ the name lingering, perhaps, more in Ireland than in England or Scotland.

.In this good year 1900, however, we eschew the half-dozen hooks and the dead baits. One hook is sufficient, and the bait has to be alive. Instead of being worked briskly up and down, it is held steadily in one position for two or three minutes, sometimes much longer. With the exception of the few inches of line to which the hook is attached, the paternoster is usually made of medium salmon gut down to the loop holding the hook-link, and below that trout gut, for this portion has only to bear the weight of the lead; and if the lead should catch anything, it is better that the gut should break below the hook than above it. It seems a simple matter to drop a tackle of this description into the water, letting the lead rest on the bottom and holding the rod steadily until a pike is felt to take the bait; but

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such is by no means the beginning and end of pater-nostering.

A rather lighter and longer rod is desirable for this tackle than for spinning or live-baiting with the float, and the pike fisher should practise swinging the lead out pendulum fashion, underhand, and dropping it quietly and dexterously into all kinds of nooks and corners, particularly holes among weeds, where he may expect to find a pike. Certainly the best bait is a small dace, though gudgeon are much used; and very often a gudgeon will attract a thumping perch or two if

the tackle be not too coarse. Long casts are rarely necessary, at any rate in rivers, and there is no better plan than to hold a few yards of line in the hand, releasing it, and letting the lead shoot out as it swings forward.

The line for paternostering should certainly be waterproof, otherwise it is likely to kink, or cling to the rod ; and by waterproof I mean not a mere greasing with vaseline, but a proper dressing with linseed oil, which may be mixed with a little copal varnish—say one-third varnish and two-thirds linseed oil, a useful dressing for this particular purpose. The waterproofing will be all the more effectually done if the line, while in the mixture, is placed under. the reservoir of an air-pump and the air exhausted. All

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the best lines for fly-fishing purposes are now dressed in this manner ; but the trout fisher, as a rule, prefers pure linseed oil, which, after many months of drying and repeated dressings, gives a very soft and pleasing result. The line, having been soaked, should be stretched between two trees while still wet, and the superfluous oil mixture removed from it. Then when dry it can be given a smoothing down with a piece of oily rag or chamois leather. If there are any considerable excrescences on it, as there may be if it has not been very carefully plaited, these may be rubbed down with

very fine sandpaper, but this process is not often required. The best silk lines, by the way, are plaited absolutely solid. The old-fashioned method was to plait them either hollow or round a core. A few lines are still made in this way, and should be carefully avoided.

A point which often puzzles the beginner in connection with the paternoster is the proper distance at which to place the hook-link from the lead. Eighteen inches to two feet is a good general distance; but if we are fishing a very deep hole I should recommend it to be three feet from the bottom if the water is clear, while at any place where the bottom is thickly covered with a short growth of weeds the hook must be so far above the lead that

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it runs no danger of entanglement. Such a fishing ground, however, is better worked with float-tackle than with the paternoster. It may happen that when pike fishing with paternoster tackle it becomes necessary to make a long cast, and this may be done either off the reel in Trent fashion, as already described, or according to the Thames method.

So far I have only dealt with the subject of using a small bait on a paternoster. With larger baits a single hook is very apt to miss the pike, which, as has been shown, seizes a prey of

any size crosswise but in the case of small baits takes them wholly into its mouth. For the larger baits, then, some different kind of hook arrangement is desirable. In the previous chapter I described a triangle with one hook reversed. This is very useful for paternostering if placed at the end of the gimp. Two inches above it, or thereabouts, there should be a single hook. The latter is placed through both lips of the bait, while the triangle is caught in its side. I need hardly say that this arrangement is much more likely to catch in weeds than the single hook, so that in very weedy places it is better to use a small bait which enables one to do without the triangle.

Striking when paternostering requires some judgment. A hard strike is not necessary if a single

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hook is used, unless there is a good deal of line out, in which case the elasticity of the line has to be overcome before any considerable pressure is felt on the mouth of the jack. One need not, as a general rule, strike more than half as hard as when spinning; but it is a good plan to put rather heavy pressure on the fish during the first second or two, which insures the hook penetrating well over the barb unless it has unfortunately caught against a hard bone, when no amount of pressure will cause it to penetrate. It is because the strike

need not be particularly hard that a finer line can be used when paternostering than when fishing with either float or spinning tackle. I have, by the way, sometimes found it a convenience to place a float on the line above the paternoster, and send it down stream. This is an advantage where the bottom for some distance is thickly coated with lily leaves and no proper float-tackle is at hand, and may be regarded as a little makeshift. For this and similar purposes, the float with a slot in the side, designed by Mr. R. B. Marston, is very convenient.

It is remarkable how gently pike sometimes take paternoster baits. There are days when the angler feels nothing but a vicious tug, or a succession of tugs. On other occasions there will be a gentle and hardly perceptible shaking of the rod point, which

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will go on for as much as a minute, the angler doubting whether it is a fish or merely the movements of the bait. There need be no delay in striking when once it is certain that a pike has seized the bait. Some few pike fishers make a practice of letting the pike go off with the bait when paternostering, and partly gorge it. But this is a bad plan

(unless the bait be large and a single hook is used), for as often as not the lead catches in something, checks the fish in its run, and the bait is quickly ejected. On the whole, I am inclined to rank this method of pike fishing next to and not long after spinning. It is extremely pretty and delicate work dropping the paternoster among the reedy and weedy haunts of the pike in late summer and autumn. In winter the eddies, big and little, may be searched, and if the water be at all thick we can with this tackle work the bait close against the bank, almost among the roots of the sedges, where many a good fish lies out of the swirling current.

It will probably surprise not a few pike fishers to read that pike can be, and indeed often are, caught on the ledger, a tackle generally associated with barbel fishing. With other live-bait tackles it will be observed that the line rises up more or less vertically through the water, and almost immediately above the

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bait. Thus any pike going to inspect an attractive dace or gudgeon can hardly help observing that some connection exists between the proposed meal and the regions of air. With the ledger, on the other hand, the bait is at the end of the line and the lead lies on the bottom. Though the running line starts from the lead to the surface in a slanting direction, the

bait itself is a yard or more distant, so that the connection between the two is not so obvious as in the case of the paternoster or float-tackle. I imagine it is for this reason that I have found the ledger most useful in very clear water, when the pike were exceedingly shy and difficult of capture. But, on the other hand, I have also found it deadly in winter, when the water was somewhat coloured and the fish were lying close to the bottom, being collected in eddies, particularly those found at the tails of islands.

The pike ledger does not differ materially from that used for barbel except in the matter of strength. It is mainly composed of salmon gut, but the lead should work on at least a foot of gimp, and the hook also should be mounted on the same material. I prefer flat leads to round ones, and in large rivers usually have about four feet of line between my bait and the lead. If the bottom is Very clear and only

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large baits are available, then the triangle and lip-hook arrangement which I have described in my remarks on paternostering can be used, but there is a very great chance of the triangle catching in the bottom. It should, in any case, be small and placed well up on the back of the bait.

A ledger is very simply made by placing the lead on the

running line. Below the running line comes four feet of salmon gut or a little less, and on to this is looped the hook mounted on gimp. It is well to remember, however, that at the end of a few hours' fishing the lead will probably have frayed the silk line, a few inches of which should be broken off and the new end re-tied to the gut.

In concluding these remarks on the practical and technical side of pike fishing, I would add a word or two concerning the importance of using fine tackle on certain occasions. A tackle which will answer admirably on a blustering winter day, when the pike have been kept without food owing to a long-continued flood, will be of no use in the summer, when from their lairs among the weeds these voracious fish can dash out at any moment into the shoal of bleak, minnows, roach, or other small inhabitants of the water.

A clever old Thames fisherman once gave me a

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fine object lesson in the use of fine tackle. It was summer-time ; the water was low, and from the loss of several sets of tackle when spinning for trout earlier in the season he had concluded that a number of pike were collected in a certain backwater. With me in the punt was a friend who had ordinary, gimp, float-tackle of medium thickness. The old

fisherman provided me with a rather large roach float, fine gut, and a small bait, not very much larger than a minnow, on a No. 7 hook mounted on three inches of the finest gimp. With this delicate tackle I caught several brace of pike, while my friend took nothing, though he was a skilful fisherman.

On another occasion (but this was in winter) I went to fish a noted hole for perch, a big eddy caused by a considerable widening of the river, where there was water enough to fish all through the day. While I paternostered for perch near the punt, I threw out some fairly fine pike tackle baited with a dace. The water was very clear, and the perch were absolutely off the feed; but on my fine gut perch paternoster I kept catching pike—in all, several brace—but none would take the dace which was expressly intended for them. The next day I went to the spot and exactly the same thing occurred. A very expert pike fisher of my acquaintance once

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gave up using gimp. All his tackle was mounted on gut, which, of course, was bitten through from time to time; but he had so many more runs, that for a time he became a firm believer in this very fine and risky tacit le. Fearing that some day he might hook a monster, the pike of his lifetime, and have the mortification of losing it, he reverted to gimp, but

during the gut period he certainly had the satisfaction of catching more pike than other people. 1

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CHAPTER XII

PIKE IN TROUT WATERS BY W. H. POPE

In its own characteristic haunts the pike should undoubtedly be encouraged, but in rivers which are devoted solely to the preservation of trout the presence of this predatory and voracious fish cannot be -tolerated. Angling authorities and practical fishermen are agreed that untold mischief may be wrought in a trout fishery by allowing the pike to gain a permanent abode therein, and when once its evil influences become firmly rooted endless trouble and expense may be incurred ere the damage is repaired.

In his * Practical Management of Fisheries' the late Mr. Francis Francis placed the pike at the head of the list comprising the trout's enemies, and stated his opinion that a 4-lb. pike would do more harm in a season than all the poachers in the district.

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Dr. Day, also, in his ' British and Irish SalmonidaV says that ' pike in trout preserves not only diminish the inhabitants, but scare them to that extent that they become timorous of feeding, and frequently occasion a great falling off in the general condition of the trout/ The forcible anathemas which are constantly being levelled by trout fishermen against the pike's existence in streams where it is an unwelcome intruder seem thus to have some justification in fact.

If the distribution of the pike in our islands had been limited to those rivers, lakes, and ponds for which it is known to show a decided partiality, its natural vices would not have been so widely proclaimed nor its character blackened. As the case stands to-day, however, I believe there is scarcely a river in England, possessing any considerable length of what may be termed * pikey-looking' water, in which this fish has not made its appearance. Opinions differ as to whether the pike is indigenous to our trout streams, but according to some of our best ichthyologists there is abundant proof that it has always been a native of our waters, though often somewhat local in its range.

The strict trout preserver's creed forbids the association of pike and coarse fish with the trout, and his aim and object is therefore the extermination of the former if it can possibly be accomplished-

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How often his efforts in this direction are frustrated, or fall short of the mark, is a matter of common knowledge among fishermen. Incessant warfare must be waged against the enemy by every means which ingenuity can devise, and if the work is thoroughly well done the preserver may reap some consolation in having been at any rate able to hold his foes in check.

The misfortunes which may overtake the trout preserver's schemes are manifold. Even assuming that the destruction of the pike and coarse fish in his particular length of water has been successfully achieved, he may nevertheless suffer seriously from the neglect of his neighbour to destroy them in the adjoining section of the river. Once rid of these pests, his energies must be applied to preventing any fresh blood from entering his domains. Pike invade the trout's sanctuary in many different ways. Any fishery owner on the river who harbours pike and coarse fish is a chronic menace to the trout preserver, because, given favourable conditions, sooner or later some of them will certainly stray into other parts of the water, and there probably propagate their species.

Several cases have come under my notice where land owners who were not fishermen, and did not

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therefore appreciate the obvious duties which they owed to their riparian neighbours, have by their indifference caused the ruin of a trout water. Then, again, there are owners of fishing rights who adopt only half measures in dealing with the evil influences. A certain amount of netting may be done, but the work is frequently set about in a very rudimentary manner, and left to someone who knows next to nothing about practical netting, and cares less about the results.

The possibility of pike and coarse fish finding their way into trout waters is ever present to the preserver, but his fishery is specially vulnerable in the pike's spawning season, for, when these fish run up into the ditches and carriers for that purpose, they are not unlikely to escape the keeper's vigilant eye. A future generation of pike may be thus easily introduced quite unseen; and when it is stated that a female pike is computed to shed 10,000 ova to every pound of her weight, the serious injury which may be inflicted is laid bare. Mr. Valentine Corrie informs me that on the upper waters of the Itchen the present foul state of some of the lower-lying ditches and carriers used by the farmers for irrigating their meadow land has become a fisherman's grievance, as, when half choked with weeds and rushes, they provide

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perfect hiding places for young jack as well as for spawners. Now that the meadow land is given up to cattle, the banks of the main stream, the sides of ditches, and such like places are trampled down, and farmers seldom care to go to the trouble of cleaning them out in the same way as when the meadow feed was principally used for sheep. These ditches and carriers, moreover, offer considerable facilities to travelling pike, as by following their intricate windings they can avoid such formidable impediments as mills, weirs, and hatches, which would otherwise bar their way in the main river.

Large ponds and lakes at the head of or by the side of a trout stream are a continual nuisance to the trout preserver. Snugly ensconced ' in leafy shade/ and dotted here and there with patches of reeds and rushes, these attractive sheets of water present a charming picture in summer. As the angler artist pauses to revel in the peaceful scene, and watch the water fowl playing at hide and seek among the rushes, no inharmonious thought finds room in his mind. But let him awake from his reverie, and he will see that such places as these are the pike's true home and breeding ground. From here in due season, when its adventurous spirit tempts it to embark on a voyage of discovery, the pike drops back into the

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happy hunting grounds of the adjoining trout stream. Observations show that in this manner its species is often distributed over miles of river, to the discomfiture of all trout preservers.

Such typical pike haunts as Alresford Pond, Avington, and Grange Lakes on the river Itchen have poured forth their legions into that river for years. The pike usually select rough, wet, and windy weather when working down stream. That they do not shift their quarters to any extent in flood water may be concluded from the fact that only one jack has been caught in the eelgrates on the Worthys waters during fifty years. Alresford Pond is rapidly becoming silted up with mud and weed, while the amount of netting, wiring, spinning, &c, done on the Itchen lengths below Avington Lake effectually reduces the numbers of escaped jack on that length of the river. To give some idea of the magnitude of a pike invasion I am credibly informed that the average annual bag on four miles of the Worthys water does not fall far short of 550 pike. What would be the final state of this notable chalk stream if operations against the pike were suspended for any considerable period may be reasonably predicted. Fortunately in good hands there need be no fear that its future welfare will be overlooked.

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Besides those above mentioned, there are lakes and ponds near most of our trout streams which contribute their share of vermin to the river; nor does it appear that pike, when on the move, are in any way discouraged by the necessity of travelling long distances to reach their goal. Scarcity of food or a growing population of piscivorous fish in their original haunts are no doubt the principal incentives for them to seek * fresh woods and pastures new/ In the absence of these pike harbours it is noteworthy that the head waters of many of our trout streams are remarkably free from pike.

No legal offence is committed by the culprit who introduces pike into a trout stream within the bounds of his own fishery; but it would be a highly unsportsmanlike action on his part if he were to do so, and most discourteous to his neighbours. Instances have occurred, however, where ignorant or thoughtless persons have stocked their waters with these marauding fish, to the serious detriment of the trout sections of the river. On a well-known trout river many years ago, a large number of pike were released, with disastrous results to the trout preservers both above and below the locality in which they were introduced. The notion was at the time conceived by several fishermen that the pike might be pre-

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vented from entering the lower parts of the water by building a dam across the river; but if the work was ever carried out, I have no information as to the results. This method of fencing was considered a practical way out of the difficulty, because pike are known to be much averse to descending a fall. Fencing against pike is not looked upon with much favour by trout preservers, and there is seldom any need for it when all the principal parties interested combine to eradicate the pest by persistent netting and other well-known means.

There is yet another way by which pike are said to be introduced to trout waters. It has often been suggested that water fowl may be a medium by which spawn is occasionally transported from one place to another. I mentioned the matter to a well-known pisciculturist not long since, and he quite agreed that it was extremely likely that such roving birds as ducks, for instance, might carry sticky spawn about their bodies and legs, and in that way deposit it in strange waters. Herons have been known to pouch several spawning fish at one place and disgorge them after flying some distance. The last swallowed passenger, if a pike, would probably be alive after quite a long trip through the air. The halo of mystery which enveloped the minds of ancient observers (see 'The Compleat Angler, '

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ed. 1653) regarding the sudden appearance of young pike in places where they had not hitherto been noticed, is in the light of these facts to a great extent dissipated.

Although there are pike in most of our trout streams, it is sometimes difficult to detect their whereabouts, excepting perhaps in the spawning season. Of course if they show themselves on the shallows, or strike off from under the banks, leaving a trail of disturbed mud behind them to mark their point of departure, there is no room for doubt. But the big fish usually lie under weeds in deep holes, or in dark circling eddies which no human eye can penetrate. What vain delusions, then, do some fishermen cherish when they assert that they have no pike in their water simply because they have not seen them there ! It is said that, if a river holds any number of pike, the presence of roach, dace, and trout minus part of their scales, or exhibiting other signs of having been in the wars, is a sure indication that pike are somewhere near at hand. This may be so, but I know of many pike rivers where one does not see a scarred fish once in five years.

From the point of view of the trout preserver the banishment of the pike is considered a sine qua non in the development of his fishery. Esox

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lucius unfortunately possesses an inordinate love for young trout, which trait has accentuated its disrepute. Nor does the evidence against the pike acquit it of the slaughter of the young trout's bigger brother, for numerous instances might be cited in which pike have successfully disposed of trout from one to many pounds in weight. Now and then we hear of the tables being turned, and some old cannibal trout carrying the war into the enemy's country and swallowing a small pike.

It is difficult to gauge the extent of the excesses which may be committed in the pike's private life, as it is not a fish which is given to feeding much in public. But when the contents of the pike's stomach reveal time after time the presence of trout in process of digestion, there can exist no doubt about its predilection for Salmonidae. The grayling, however, does not, for some occult reason, appear to be a special favourite with the pike. Out of large numbers of pike which were netted from a celebrated trout and grayling water in the south of England no sign of a grayling's remains could be found in their stomachs, although a quantity of young trout were present in various stages of digestion.

In his ' Making a Fishery,' Mr. Halford gives the autopsical results which were obtained from

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the examination of four pike. In one instance, a 9-in. pike had partially digested a trout com-puced to be four inches long; a 7^-lb. pike, besides other kinds of fish, had swallowed a trout weighing about 1^ lb.; an 11-in. pike had found room for three lamperns, two bullheads, and two yearling trout; the fourth pike of 2^ lb. had the tail of a |-lb. trout protruding from its jaws. The author's comments are worthy of repetition ; he says : 'Take these four examples, multiply them by the thousands of pike in a neglected trout stream, consider the rapid rate at which they increase, and no further argument can be needed to demonstrate the paramount necessity of declaring war to the knife against Esox lucius?

Many fishermen have expressed the opinion that, in rivers where the pike for various reasons cannot be exterminated or kept within proper bounds, it is a good plan to retain a small head of coarse fish for the pike to feed upon, and thereby save the trout from decimation. I do not think that a hungry pike when out foraging for food would spare a trout which chanced to cross its path, but if it can be proved that the coarse fish are more easily captured than the trout, and that the pike is a lazy feeder, the contention would appear well founded.

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The actions of the pike when attacking a shoal of roach or dace are generally known, but its methods of procedure when the wily trout is the object of its onslaught can rarely be more than surmised.

In the case of the coarse fish, the pike, metaphorically speaking, sets up its bristles and makes a sudden dash among them as they fly together for mutual protection. In their panic-stricken state the shoal is speedily scattered in every direction by the violence of the assault, and amid this commotion the pike seizes its victim and promptly withdraws to its lair to pouch it. The trout, on the other hand, is solitary in its habits, and, in the event of danger, usually darts off to some place of concealment from which its foe cannot drive it. The rapidity with which its flight is effected, and the minute nooks and corners into which a trout can squeeze itself, should facilitate its chances of escape unless the pursuing pike shows unwonted energy and activity.

The numbers of coarse fish in a river seem to vary according to the stock of pike ; thus when the pike are increasing the coarse fish diminish, and vice versd. The accuracy of this statement is amply corroborated by some statistics which Mr. H. Collins, the Hon. Sec. of the Wilton Fly Fishing Club, has kindly given me. The club rents

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about ten miles of the river Wylye in Wiltshire, which since 1890 has been taken in hand and raised to a high state of preservation. At first the stream was found to be in a very neglected condition. The shallows had not been cleaned; millers and farmers cut, or abstained from cutting, the weeds according to fancy; pike and coarse fish had increased and multiplied; poachers, without let or hindrance, carried on their nefarious practices; and although there were a few large trout and grayling in the water, no stocking had been attempted. The work of improvement was undertaken on extensive lines, and the destruction of the pike and coarse fish claimed the immediate attention of the management In 1890, 1891, and 1892, 3,526 pike and 10,772 coarse fish were taken, the latter thus preponderating in the proportion of three to one. From 1893 to 1898 inclusive only 255 pike were taken against 11,822 coarse fish, the relative proportion of coarse fish thus curiously rising from three to one to forty-six to one. While, therefore, the pike decreased in numbers, the coarse fish, which must be admitted as an important item in the pike's daily menu, showed a decided increase.

The latest returns, I understand, seem to warrant the belief that the contrast in the figures will be

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no less striking in the future. No estimate can of course be formed respecting the toll exacted in respect of the young Salmonidae when the river was re-stocked, but it is not improbable that the presence of the coarse fish saved the life of many a juvenile Fario. At the age when small fish are usually introduced, considerable mortality might have been traceable to the pike's depredations. Being strange to their surroundings, they are likely to have attracted the notice of these most inquisitive fish, in which case the fate of many would have been sealed from the first. Thousands of pounds have, alas ! in some rivers been wasted in making these costly presents to pike, notwithstanding the care which may be taken to release the young fish in the most suitable places.

Although it may be conceded that coarse fish fall an easier prey than the trout, a pike of 5 lb, or 6 lb. ranging over a considerable extent of water in the long run doubtless destroys quite as many trout as coarse fish. The disadvantages of keeping dace, chub, and other coarse fish in trout water are principally these: they compete with trout and grayling for food, they are a disturbing element in the water, ancj an intolerable nuisance to the angler when the trout are rising.freely.

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It is a matter of certainty that pike will follow the coarse fish

into any water where the latter have established themselves. This fact is proved by my experiences on the river Frome in Dorsetshire, and especially in that part which is preserved by the Dorchester Fishing Club. Kingston Pond still holds a number of pike, some of which occasionally drop down stream through a narrow outlet communicating with the main river. The first pool, which they would pass through on their way, lies below Bock-hampton Village Bridge, and this place is exceedingly well stocked with good-sized trout. It is an unusual circumstance to see as many as half a dozen roach and chub in this hole, and I have certainly never noticed a pike in it. In another pool, however, a few hundred yards below the bridge, there are large quantities of coarse fish, and here the pike will stop if anywhere in the river. It has not been netted for some time, but I expect that the next haul will include most of the vermin which visit this part of the club water. Possibly some of them work up from below in search of food, for, as a friend quaintly remarked to me, in the event of a scarcity they would climb a ladder.

On one occasion a pike of about 4 lb. seized a 14-oz. trout which I was playing in this pool.

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For some minutes the pike afforded excellent fun, and I suspect wondered at the mysterious resistance which my

powerful little fly rod exercised over its freedom. Up and down stream the pike rushed with my trout across its jaws, showing every sign of anger, but it did not attempt to pouch the fish. At length I induced my friend to come closer to the rushes, where I was crouching unseen. Its eyes had a remorseless expression, and it showed the greatest reluctance to yield up the prize. Rather than relinquish its hold, to my utter astonishment the pike allowed me to pass my net under it in the water and scoop the pair into safety on the bank. In the net, however, the pike realised the mistake, and promptly dropped my trout which had brought such trouble upon him.

There are some rivers in England where the trout do not rise freely, although natural flies are abundant, and it is suggested that in certain cases this may be due to the presence of pike in the water. Dr. Edward Hamilton, in his * Riverside Naturalist,' relates an instance which came under his notice on the river Itchen. He says that at one time there were large numbers of pike there, and no trout would rise in the daytime; but as soon as they were destroyed, the trout began to feed again as usual. The pike is one of

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the trout's natural enemies, but I cannot believe that where it is merely an occasional visitor it would prevent the trout

from surface feeding, unless per-adventure the pike's lair was in close proximity to the trout's rising station. It does not seem at all likely that a trout would be so indiscreet as gaily to rise at flies, knowing that from its place of concealment some hungry pike was watching every movement and only waiting for a favourable opportunity to snap it up in its jaws.

On a small river bordering the county of Herts I am firmly convinced that one of the reasons why trout take so badly now is that, through neglect, the water is over-run by pike. There are still trout in different parts, and formerly during the May fly season they provided excellent sport. Two years ago I was privileged to have a couple of days' fishing there, and notwithstanding that the show of May fly was quite considerable very few fish were taking them. Those which I succeeded in killing rose in the shallower parts, where the pike did not habitually lie. If their abstention from surface feeding in the deeper parts was not due to the near presence of pike, I can think of no other satisfactory explanation. May flies were plentiful, trout were there, because I had seen them earlier in the

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morning, and so were the pike, for I had observed them also

as they darted away from under the banks to deeper water.

I would here venture to offer a few remarks respecting another class of river, which perhaps does not fall altogether under the category of bona-fide trout waters. At the same time these rivers often carry a small head of trout among the various tribes of pike and coarse fish forming the river's piscine stock. This kind of water is commonly found in the lower and lower middle sections of the river, and being of a big, heavy character it is unsuited to the exclusive cultivation of trout or grayling. The Wiltshire Avon furnishes an excellent illustration of this type of water. In the right kind of weather I have noticed what might be called a nice sprinkling of fly on the surface, but neither the trout nor grayling take it; in fact, it is seldom that they condescend to feed upon such trifles.

The trout and grayling in these waters run to a large size, are remarkably handsome, and their condition, when in season, is all that can be desired. The supply of food is marvellous, but it is probable that the fish in this river owe their substantial proportions to the swarms of small fry which pander to their cannibalistic nature. To the trout fisherman* of the dry fly order this kind of water might prove unattractive;

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but for the all-round angler, and the man who does not disdain the use of a salmon fly or a spinning bait, there is a store of sport. Nature's balance appears to be fairly maintained as regards the relative numbers of Salmonidae and coarse fish which live there. Now and then an enthusiast arises with the laudable determination to re-stock the river with young Salmonidae. Much money is spent in carrying out his objects, but, in view of the piscivorous propensities of the river's population, I fear the returns seldom reach the high estimate for which his imagination has led him to hope.

The modern craze for establishing trout in unsuitable waters has caused the ruin of many former pike haunts, with no compensating results so far as the trout are concerned. A good pike river can seldom be converted into an equally good trout stream, and, bearing in mind the growing scarcity of first-class pike fishing, it would seem that some fishery proprietors are following a mistaken policy, which might in the end prove costly to them.

A large and valuable stock of trout is maintained in many of our lakes and reservoirs, in these islands. Both in Lake Windermere and Loch Leven, for instance, there are still pike, and occasionally reports come to hand of heavy fish taken by various means.

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No pains are being spared to reduce their numbers, but having regard to the vast nature of the undertaking the final collapse of the pike dynasty is not yet in sight. Since pike and coarse fish cannot under any circumstances be permitted to occupy a place in strictly preserved trout streams, the question as to how they may be got rid of must be briefly considered.

There are several methods which trout preservers adopt and vary according to circumstances for their destruction, but netting is undoubtedly the most efficacious, and indeed a wholesale way of obtaining their object. In neglected rivers, where pike and coarse fish have been allowed to increase in overwhelming numbers, it is customary to net the water systematically for three or four years in succession during the spring and autumn months. When, however, the bulk of these undesirable fish have been exterminated, it is deemed sufficient to net once annually at the close of each trout season. Many fishery proprietors, after a few years of persistent netting, instruct their keepers to use the nets only in those parts where pike or coarse fish are actually seen, and not to drag the water through from end to end. Experienced men can often do more execution by this limited netting than others would accomplish by netting the whole length There

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are, too, these additional advantages; first, the water is left practically undisturbed, for nothing unsettles fish so much as the sight of a net following upon the demolition of their weedy homes; and, secondly, no trout or grayling will have been injured by rough treatment in the nets.

Several preliminary matters * must be arranged before the netting operations are begun. Thus the dates fixed for the work should be convenient for the farmers, millers, and others who might be affected.by interference with the natural flow of the water. The weeds in the main river, tributaries, carriers, and ditches require cutting so that the net may be prevented from rolling, and the hiding-places for fish removed. The keepers, too, must arrange to have control over all hatches and sluices, to lower or raise the water level as occasion may demand. An excellent suggestion is offered by Mr. Halford in his * Making a Fishery,' and it is worthy of adoption, especially when netting a strange river. In order to ascertain the locality of the deep holes and the position of all obstructions, which might hang up or tear the nets, he advises that a heavy chain should be dragged along the river bed and a note made of every spot where extra precautions should be taken to keep the nets clear of awkward impediments.

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According to the latest and most approved system of netting, the use of three nets, including a trammel, a heavy drag net, and a stop or purse net, is recommended for general work on a large scale. In small waters and carriers the ordinary drag and stop nets will, nevertheless, answer the purpose, and there are many men who still act on these principles. It is a matter of the greatest importance that the lead lines should be kept close to the bottom of the river, and any undue haste on the part of the men must be avoided, if no means of escape under the nets are to be left open to the fish.

No keeper should omit to carry a wire in his pocket. Its services may be requisitioned at any moment to effect the capture of stray pike which may take up their temporary residence in a convenient spot for snaring them. There is scope for much skill and judgment in pike wiring, and a master hand has been frequently known to slay from twenty to thirty pike of different sizes in a single day. On a bright, calm morning in May or June, before the May fly rise begins, the amateur pike wirer may profitably pass his time away by exploring the shallow brooks and by-streams on his fishery, and keeping a sharp look out for any pike which may be basking in the sun. Even if he does not succeed

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in passing the wire round the deadly spot, or meet with the

measure of success which he expected from the apparent simplicity of the thing, a morning with the pike wire provides a novel form of amusement.

The pike wirer's movements must be stealthy, and his actions deliberate. Having discovered a jack in position, he should endeavour to place himself opposite the quarry, and keep his eyes steadily fixed on it as he quietly extends his bamboo rod, to which the wire is attached, and lowers the noose slowly into the water a short distance above the pike's nose. To prevent any miscalculations which may be caused by the refraction of light in the water, it is best to keep the wire as near as possible to the bed of the river in shallow places, and gradually pass it over the pike's head until it encircles the middle of its body. A sharp backward movement of the bamboo pole will draw the noose tightly round the fish, and by a steady swing it may be brought to the bank.

There are times when the fish will not allow such a liberty to be taken, but the pike wirer should not be disconcerted by a first or second failure. It must often happen that, after being driven from point to point and continually bamboozled, a small fish will lie to the wire. The largest pike I ever saw captured by

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this means weighed a little over 18 lb., and it is difficult to say whether the bare-legged operator or the struggling fish was most alarmed, for while drawing it to the bank the pike made a ferocious attack on the man's legs, and succeeded in inflicting a nasty wound.

Pike may sometimes be caught by ' trimmering' the holes, and by shooting or spearing them on the shallows. A favourable time to work with the trimmer seems to be in autumn about dusk. On one occasion I set six trimmers in some deep water, where the pike had well nigh ousted the trout Three of the baits were taken almost immediately, and I carried home two large and one small fish. On the other hand, for several days subsequently when pike were 'off the feed,' the most seductive looking dace, as a bait, would not tempt them.

In the foregoing pages I have endeavoured to point out some of the reasons why the pike is considered a pest in strictly preserved trout waters. There are anglers, I am fully aware, who regard this fish in the light of a useful scavenger, whose mission in life is to weed out the sickly and degenerate fish. The experience of many careful observers, however, goes to show that this opinion is

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erroneous; for a self-respecting pike is an epicure in its way,

and prefers the fattest and best conditioned specimens as food, when it can procure them. By nature the pike is the tyrant of fresh waters; its sporting qualities are undeniable, but it can never hope to find a friend in the person of the trout preserver.

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THE PERCH

BY

JOHN BICKERDYKE

' More wholesome than a perch of the Rhine'

German Proverb

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CHAPTER I

PERCH AND PERCH FISHING

Like many other fish, the perch has been the subject of much misrepresentation at the hands of the older angling writers*. Even ichthyologists have misnamed him Perca fluviatilis, signifying, if the usually received etymology of the word is correct, the dark fish of the river. Yet the perch as we know him is, until he arrives at a venerable age, somewhat gorgeous as to his colours, and is even more at home in lakes and ponds than in running waters. The old Anglo-Saxon word ' bears/ the Dutch * baars,' and the German 'barsch/ all signifying a banded fish, were better. In Westmoreland the name ' barse,'1 believe, still lingers, and in Cumberland ' base/

The Saxons, by the way, used to represent one of their gods with unclad feet standing on the prickly dorsal fin of a perch. This, it has been suggested, was to be regarded as an emblem of patience in adversity and of constancy under trial. To-day a

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representation of a perch fisher on the Thames in August, with the water lit by the sultry sun and clear as crystal, and steam launches hurrying by him every few minutes, would be equally emblematic.

In British fresh waters the perch has but one relative, the little ruffe or pope (Acerina vulgaris). In salt water, on the other hand, he has several connections, notably that most sporting sea fish, the bass (Labrax lupus), which does not come under consideration in the present monograph.

I have said that the perch has been misrepresented by the older angling writers as well as by ichthyologists. Though we have such a huge mass of angling literature, the old worthies who made pretence of teaching the young idea how to fish largely copied one another ; and those who have studied the old calf-bound books of yellow page and rugged type will find that a blunder, once perpetrated, will be blindly repeated by author after author, often in the same words. Walton, and I believe I am correct in saying at least one other writer before him, described the perch as 'a bold-biting fish.' And so he is on occasion. But in those bygone days there were no fence months, perch were fished for all the year round; and the recommendation by the author of the ' Compleat Angler,' and others who

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followed and copied him, was to angle for perch in May, at a time when the fish had recently spawned, and were naturally ravenous for food and easy of capture. Viator begs Piscator, i Since you see it still rains^ May butter, to give me some observations and directions concerning the perch. For they say he is both a very good and a bold-biting fish.' 'You say true, Scholar/ answers Piscdtor, * the perch is a very good and a very bold-biting fish. He is one of the fishes of prey which, like the pike and trout, carries his teeth in his mouth, not in his throat.' Piscator then goes on to give the valuable information that in his brain the perch carries a stone, (which is in forrain parts sold by Apothecaries, being there noted to be very medicinable against the stone in the, reins.' He also informs Viatot 'that, notwithstanding these merits,, some persons commend the sea-perch, ' of which they say, we English see but a few, to be a much better fish.'

Equally reliable is Walton's statement that the perch is ' a bold fish, such a one as, but for extreme hunger, the Pike will not devour,' and that he is very abstemious in winter. As it is in winter that the, perch gather in deep holes in large numbers, it is somewhat contradictory to read after this statement that ' if there be twentie or fortie in, a hole, they

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be at one standing all catch'd one after another; they being like the wicked of the world; not afraid, though their fellowes and companions perish in the fight' This is true enough, but the statement applies more particularly to winter fishing; and, paradoxical as it may seem, while the perch, like the wicked of the world, show no fear when their comrades are slaughtered, should one escape slaughter by getting off the hook the whole shoal are very apt to take alarm, and either seek refuge in flight or sullenly refuse the tempting minnow.

Walton's advice that when a perch bites he should be given ample time to get the hook well into his mouth is good if taken in moderation. Other writers who have followed Walton go a step further and insist upon the perch being allowed to gorge the bait, remarking that this will necessitate the use of a disgorger !

The sportsmen of to-day, dreading the extermination of these plucky, cautious, and most wholesome little fish, very wisely not only decline to fish in May, but in many waters make

regulations by which fish under a certain length (seven or eight inches) have to be returned to the water. The gorging proposition which involves the destruction of fish of all sizes, no longer holds good, and perch are for the most part

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hooked fairly and squarely in the mouth or not at all. Still, when fishing with a somewhat too large worm, on a somewhat too small hook, Walton's advice should be borne in mind or the fish will not adorn the creel.

Another mistake of ancient anglers and naturalists was that the perch was self-conceptive—in other words, a hermaphrodite. It is certainly true that instances of hermaphroditism among fish, including the perch, have been recorded—I have myself seen a live hermaphrodite trout—but perch, like other freshwater fish, are divided into two sexes, the males milting the spawn which is deposited by the females. It is a curious fact, however, which I have often noticed, that one catches very few male perch with rod and line. Among a basket of twenty or thirty fish I have sometimes failed to find a single male.

The time of spawning is in the early spring, varying from the end of February to April or even later, according to the season and the climate of the district. The female perch seeks

quiet waters for this purpose. I have seen them in hundreds in the canal above Newbury, near its junction with the Kennet, where they had retired from the river to pass their brief honeymoon. But though I have watched perch lying among the weeds of the canal, close to the bank, ready

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to spawn, and have also seen many yards of the curious milky-white, semi-opaque ribbons of glutinous matter which contains the eggs, I have never yet observed perch in the actual act of depositing their eggs.

In big rivers the females frequently spawn alongside the bank, in about two feet of water, but occasionally so near the surface that the eggs can be reached by ducks and other water fowl. One may see the ribbons of spawn lying on the sprouting shoots of water lilies, among weeds, on the roots of willow-trees which project from the bank below the surface of the water, and, in fact, on any object which serves to sustain the eggs at their proper level.

The eggs require sun's light or sun's warmth—possibly both —to hatch them, and the female pereh apparently endeavour to effect a happy compromise bjr placing their spawn sufficiently near the surface to be beneficially affected by the sun, and yet so deep as to be out of reach of some at least of

their enemies. It is very interesting to note how altogether different this is to the habits of trout. With the Salmonidae the eggs are hidden from the light among the gravel, and are deposited where the stream runs shallow and fast.

Sometimes female perch fall into an egregious blunder in the deposition of their eggs. One summer Uie Thames flowed full and high in the early spring, so

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that the budding tips of the willows, which usually at that season just kissed the shining surface of the water, were dipping some feet beneath the flood. ' Here is a brand-new, clean, and pleasant support expressly intended by Nature for the propagation of our race,' thought Madame Perch ; and when the water fell there were bands upon bands, millions upon millions, of perch eggs apparently growing upon willow trees. Then came the swans, also blessing mother Nature for having placed such an easily obtained and luscious supply of food within their reach; and I saw them myself, running their clattering bills down the withy boughs, stripping them one after another of that year's supply of infant perch. No wonder that enthusiastic perch fishers become heated, and use language unfit for the ears of polite society, when swans are the subject of conversation. It may be admitted at once that they are beautiful birds and notable

ornaments on a great pleasure river such as the Thames, but the destruction they wreak on the hapless perch and other fish is simply immeasurable.

It is difficult to understand why birds which are so inimical to sport should be so greatly encouraged, in some instances by men who are in other respects good sportsmen, and wield both rod and gun with no little skill. On a reach of the Thames near

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Henley may at any time be seen a huge herd of swans; and to prevent the consequent extinction of perch in that district it has been found necessary to go to the heavy expense of placing hundreds of yards of wire rabbit-netting round the little bays and projecting willow bushes which are the perch's breeding grounds. I would not go so far as to suggest the entire abolition of swans on the Thames, for others have to be considered besides fishermen, but some limit should certainly be put on the numbers of the beautiful but destructive birds. Some slight concession has been made to Thames anglers in this matter, by the removal during the spawning season of the barren swans from the river below Staines. The continuance of this arrangement appears to depend on funds being provided to defray the cost of feeding the birds while in confinement, an expense met during two

seasons by the chairman of the T. A. P. S.

If every egg that escaped the swans and other enemies hatched, and the resulting little fish grew into half-pounders, the river would be fully stocked, but the waste from various causes in the propagation of the fish is simply enormous. It is a mistake to suppose that because a single perch or other fish deposits so many thousands of eggs, that therefore the supply

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of fish is certain to be kept up. How many eggs a perch of a given size deposits cannot be stated with accuracy. Doubtless the number varies with the age of the fish. Several calculations have been made, and the results differ materially. Buckland estimated that there were 127,240 eggs in a perch weighing 2 lb. 11 oz., and 155,620 in one of 3 lb. 2 oz. On the other hand, a fish of 1 lb. 8 oz. was said to contain 280,000 eggs. In due course the eggs hatch out, and the resulting fry, which are minute creatures, commence the battle of life in their watery world. And a battle indeed it is, for they are the prey of all the predatory fish; even sticklebacks will gobble them up, their own parents eat them, they are devoured by chub, big and little, and when grown to a suitable size pike feed on them freely.

A question always of interest to sportsmen is the size their

quarry attain. The rate at which perch grow depends entirely on the size of the water in which they dwell and the amount of food it contains. In rivers and lakes, six inches at the age of three years may be stated as an average length. Those of us who are in the fifties and sixties oft sigh for the perch that are no more—for the perch of other days. When again, I wonder, shall we read of such a catch as that made by the late Francis Francis in the Kennet?

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He and a friend took home with them thirty-seven perch which weighed 60 lb. Many of them were 2 lb., and some were over that weight. Mr. Francis's companion had three large perch on his paternoster at the same time. He bagged two of them ; one was 2 lb., the other 2 lb. 4 oz., and the one which got away was larger than either of them, which, by the way, is a common experience. But alas ! the glories of the Kennet as a perch river have departed. This in all probability is owing to crude sewage no longer being allowed to pour into the stream.

Nothing is more conducive to building up a portly perch, trout, chub, dace, or roach than a liberal amount of sewage free from injurious chemicals, I do not suggest that the fish batten on the sewage to any extent; but the sewage has a manurial effect on the water-weeds, and also brings about an

enormous growth of freshwater shrimp and other water insects on which fish feed. For instance, trout in the Wandle cannot breed, the sewage fungus destroying the eggs ; but the trout with which the river is artificially stocked from time to time grow amazingly plump and fat, with small heads and deep, thick bodies.

One reason why few big perch are caught nowadays is undoubtedly the custom I have already

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alluded to of returning undersized fish to the water, and prohibiting perch fishing before June 15. The education of perch has, in consequence, almost approximated to that of trout. I know parts of the Thames where large perch are numerous; but it is only on very special occasions, when all the conditions are highly favourable to the angler, that these fish can be caught.

To what weight perch attain in English waters it is somewhat difficult to say. Pennant records one of 9 lib. taken from the Serpentine, but, as they say in the newspapers, this statement should be accepted with reserve. Well-authenticated cases of perch weighing 5 lb. and over have been recorded of late years. These fish usually come in from large private lakes in the Midlands. In the ' Field' of July 13,1889, under the head

of * Specimen Fish at the Brighton Aquarium, 7 it was mentioned that the largest freshwater perch that had ever been on public view was then swimming about in one of the tanks. The weight was stated as being between 5 and 6 lb. Earlier than this a fish weighings oz. over 5 lb. was recorded in the ' Field' as having been sent from Daventry to be set up.

As a matter of fact, a 2-lb. perch is an uncommon fish, while one of 3 lb. is very rare, particularly in

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rivers. Two fishing friends of mine—the late Mr. H. Knight, sometime Hon. Secretary of the Henley Fishery Perservation Association, and Dr. R. P. Jeston—told me that many years ago they had succeeded in catching perch of over 3 lb. in the Henley district But this was in the days when fence months were unknown, and perch fishing was allowed in May. The Hampshire Avon still occasionally yields very large perch. In the autumn of 1899 Mrs. Fordham-Spence caught a notable specimen weighing a fraction of an ounce under 3 lb. 3 oz. The bait was a gudgeon, best bait of all for large perch. The fish was lying by a projecting bush in a hole about five feet in depth. Mr. Fordham-Spence when very kindly giving me these particulars, added: * I fancy I caught the same fish two years before on a small Cleopatra spinner. He was then probably 2§ lb. and I put him back. I have found that a small

gilt Cleopatra (2 J in.) and green-backed, silver-bellied Bell's Life baits (2| in.) will take perch when the natural bait will not touch them/ This is also my experience. Another very fine perch was taken by 'Redspinner' when pike fishing under circumstances to which he has himself referred in an early chapter.

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CHAPTER II

ARTIFICIAL PERCH CULTURE

For some years now the artificial culture of perch, which is a more or less simple matter, has been carried on with varying success. The first Fisheries Exhibition in London gave a considerable impetus to the culture of coarse fish of various kinds; but the special boxes and apparatus for perch hatching, which were then exhibited, have not come into general use.

In modern trout culture the whole matter is taken almost entirely out of the hands of Dame Nature. The fish are spawned artificially, the eggs are milted artificially, hatched artificially, and the resulting fry are fed artificially. It is an instance of science giving vastly better results than anything Nature can do. In the course of the natural process many eggs

are destroyed, large numbers fail to get impregnated with the milt, and of those which are impregnated a considerable percentage do not hatch out, owing to their

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being too deeply buried in the gravel or for other reasons. The few fry which ultimately come into existence from a batch of trout eggs are attacked by all kinds of enemies, such as eels and other voracious fish, water birds and water insects, and very probably not a few die from want of food. Though trout of any size yield about a thousand eggs to each pound of their weight, not more than two or three of the fry proceeding from one redd attain maturity. This must be the case, for if trout were even to double in numbers every year the rivers would soon contain more fish than water.

So much for Nature. Science succeeds far better. Practically all the eggs which the trout culturist handles are properly impregnated, and very nearly all hatch out. In the fry stage there are, as a rule, heavy losses; but under favourable conditions the ultimate result is from forty to fifty mature trout for every hundred eggs which have been hatched. Trout and salmon culture is one of the triumphs of science. I mention these facts to make an interesting comparison.

In perch culture, on the other hand, it has been found better to leave a very great deal to Nature, rendering assistance here and there in the way of affording suitable support on which the eggs may be

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deposited, and protecting them and the fry from their numerous enemies. Perch eggs, as will have been noticed in a previous chapter, being in bands of glutinous matter, are not handled so easily as the eggs of the Salmonidae, which resemble so many little peas. It is a curious fact that while many trout eggs fail to get impregnated with milt in the natural course of events, most perch eggs get satisfactorily milted. Perhaps the reason of this is that the running water in which trout spawn, washes much of the milt away before it can reach the eggs. Perch, on the other hand, as I have already stated, spawn if possible in quiet waters, the milt spreading slowly about the place where it is deposited.

One of the most successful methods of ensuring the hatching of a large number of perch eggs is to take the ordinary open sheep-hurdle of ash or willow, weave branches of willow through the stakes, and sink this simple apparatus in four to five feet of water in the bays or backwaters of rivers which are almost or quite unaffected by the stream. In lakes, weedy bays known to be the spawning grounds of perch should be

selected. In small ponds the hurdles should simply be fixed near the bank in water of sufficient depth to contain them. These bough-covered hurdles should not be provided too long before the spawning

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season, for one of the great attractions that they have for the fish, in my opinion, is that they are absolutely clean. I have found quantities of perch spawn deposited on these hurdles within twenty-four hours after the apparatus had been arranged.

On a previous page I have explained how a certain amount of sewage sent into a river has indirectly a very fattening effect on perch and many other fish. But while sewage is beneficial in this way, it is most injurious to fish eggs. I had an opportunity of proving this to my entire dissatisfaction at Newbury some years ago. Near the town there used to be a few shoals of large perch, no doubt attracted there by the outfall of the town sewer. The water was foully polluted. The fish, though large, not being very numerous, the local angling association decided to increase the stock by putting down bough-covered hurdles. These were placed in a small artificial cutting leading from the river, a spot where perch

were accustomed to congregate in the spawning season.

I watched the experiment myself, and took careful note of the results. On the morning after the hurdles were placed in the water I found several long bands of perch spawn, containing many thousand eggs, resting lightly on the withy twigs. Day after

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day I went to look at them, and very soon I found that the sewage-charged water was depositing a filthy slime over the eggs which by degrees choked, turned white and opaque, and then rotted away.

The experiment was a failure, but it taught me a very valuable lesson. It showed how the perch egg-harvest of a polluted river might be saved. What should have been done was to remove the hurdles from the river as soon as the eggs were deposited, and place them in purer water; then doubtless, they would have hatched. I have heard of similar hurdles, bearing the spawn of coarse fish, being brought for sale to markets on the Continent.

With regard to moving perch eggs, however, I am faced with this difficulty. I have on several occasions collected the eggs with the intention of hatching them out in some safe place,

but the shaking to which they were subjected in the course of being removed [from the water invariably seemed to kill them unless they had reached the eyed stage before being disturbed; at least I put their loss down to this cause, reasoning from the analogy of salmon and trout eggs, which are hopelessly injured if shaken between a few hours after they are spawned and the appearance of the black specks, the eyes of the embryo within the shell. At this later stage the

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eggs are hardy enough, and, as all the world knows, have been exported to the Antipodes. It was thus that the rivers of certain of our great colonial possession were successfully stocked with trout.

More simple even than the hurdle method is to let the perch spawn where they will, watch the spawning places carefully, and immediately a band of eggs can be discovered protect it with wire netting from the depredations of water fowl. This simple course will do much to increase the stock of perch in any river, pond, or lake. If it is desired to introduce perch into untenanted waters, the eggs which have been thus protected as soon as they have ' eyed' can be lifted on weeds or small pieces of withy twig, placed in a carrier, and taken with as little shaking as possible to their new home. There they can be gently placed in the water, sticks being fixed into

the bank, on which they can rest, at abbut the same depth at which they were originally deposited by the parent fish. And here, too, they should, of course, be protected by wire netting.

It is not a difficult matter to hatch perch eggs in an open wooden box containing water. The sides of the box should be charred, and the eggs should be supported much the same as they would be in river or pond. I once tried hatching eggs in darkness in

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running water, without good results; but when the eggs were exposed to the light, as they would be in a river, they hatched out very satisfactorily. But, as I have said, I found them very difficult to remove from river or pond before they were fully eyed.

The difficulty of confining newly hatched perch fry in any box is considerable. I could find no zinc with sufficiently fine perforations for the purpose, for a young perch is a little, fragile, transparent thread of a thing which appears to be able to go through the smallest aperture. Finally I defeated him by putting two flannel screens, a foot apart, at the end of the box, filling up the space between with clean sand. I had to have a trickle of water running into the box to keep the

temperature down, for, working the apparatus out of doors in the sunlight, I found the water was apt to get hot in the day time, and, rightly or wrongly, considered that great changes of temperature would be harmful to the fish.

If perch culture is to be prosecuted on a large scale, I have no doubt that the ponds ordinarily used by trout culturists would answer the purpose, but they might with advantage be somewhat deeper than are used for trout, with shallows at one end. There would have to be an abundance of natural food in them, for it is doubtful if ordinary fish food could be

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minced up sufficiently fine for newly hatched perch to take it, the little creatures feeding on what are, to us, microscopic objects. It occurs to me that, though the mincer fails, it might be possible to pound up food in a pestle and mortar into a smooth paste and that this distributed in the water might be taken ; but here I am venturing into the regions of surmise.

Spealring generally, an important essential in a successful fish pond used for the artificial culture of any kind of fish, is that it can be emptied right down to the bottom, so that it can be used for fish of one * size when those fish have cannibalistic tendencies, as have trout, perch, and pike. If the pond cannot be emptied, a few thousand perch are bred in it,

netted out, say, when two or three years old, and then a fresh stock introduced. The almost certain result is that a few of the old stock will have missed the nets, and these will have a rare banquet on the fry. Moreover, the sticklebacks which always seem to get into ponds somehow or other, are most terrible enemies to the fry of most kinds of fish in their earliest stage. There should, of course, be protection from kingfishers, herons, ducks, swans, and dabchicks; and there should be an abundance of water lilies and other plants to give shade to the fish, and form a nursery for the water insects on which they feed Perch, by

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the way, are very fond of the freshwater shrimp (Gamtnaruspulex\ and no plant I know of encourages these valuable little items in a fish's diet as does the common watercress.

It will be seen from this and the foregoing chapter that there are two methods of maintaining a head of perch in any river. One is to fish it lightly and return to the water all perch under seven or eight inches, the other is to re-stock it from time to time. I used to be a strong advocate for returning undersized fish to the water, but the result, both in trout and coarse fish streams, has been such a serious advance in the education of the fish that at the present day in many waters it is only the

expert angler who is able to enjoy sport worth speaking about. Duffers and mediocrities catch next to nothing.

It is not unnatural that a fish which has been caught several times and returned to the water should, on attaining years of discretion and a length which would permit of his being slain, also attain a knowledge of things piscatorial, and by that time be anything but the bold-biting fish which Walton and the earlier writers described. Of course I do not counsel or suggest the slaughter of mere babies ; but where it is possible to re-stock a water from time

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to time, placing in it, say, double as many fish as may be killed by anglers in the course of a season, then it would be better to reduce the standard of weight or length, as the case might be, and so enable the angler who is not a past-master to occasionally catch a few fish.

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CHAPTER III

THE PERCH OF THE RIVER

The perch of the river is cautious to a degree, particularly where he has been caught times and oft in babyhood and returned to his native element to grow bigger. This is the general rule. We may possibly come across some half-stagnant shallow stream where perch are many and food is limited, and here the fish bite eagerly enough. One such little river that I have in my mind is a portion of the Loddon, robbed of most of its water by a mill to which the stream is led away through an artificial cut. Here there is never more than a foot or two of water, for mud and weeds accumulate, and there rarely comes that winter torrent which, in scouring out the bed of a river, does inestimable good to its inhabitants provided those inhabitants are not trout, or, if they be of the Salmonidae, the scouring is not done in the spawning season.

One day in a fit of curiosity I strolled to this

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little river, rod in hand, dropped in a baited paternoster, and immediately pulled out two six-inch perch. The whole of this length of the stream, so much as there was of it, seemed alive with these small and ravenous fish. There was not a half-pounder among them. I paid the place many visits afterwards, taking a big bait can with me, and transplanted some hundreds of the pigmies to larger and more suitable

waters.

But in rivers such as the Thames, Avon, Trent, Severn, &c, it is usually a matter of difficulty to induce large perch to bite, unless the water be clearing after a flood and of exactly the right colour. Then for two or three days the fishing may be really good. More than half the battle in a large river is to know where to find the fish, their position varying con siderably with the time of year and the height, colour, and temperature of the water. I have given such full and yet extremely condensed and concise information on this subject in the ' Book of the All-round Angler/ that I may perhaps be pardoned making a short extract from that work.

* About June, after spawning, perch are found in rather shallow water, where the stream runs fairly fast. All through the summer they remain for the most part among the weeds, but not out of the stream. When the weeds begin to rot, they are found scattered

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about all over the river where the bottom is gravel or sand, and abound more particularly under deep clay banks where there is a gentle stream, by the side of withies, the roots of which grow out into the water, and along old camp-shedding, i.e. where the banks have been shored up with slabs of

timber. Quiet corners in weir and mill pools are also favourite spots. They are not often found in summer where the bottom is muddy, or where there is no stream, unless the river be in flood. About October, after a few sharp, frosty nights, perch begin to form shoals and get into deep water, and where one is caught there should the angler patiently wait for a few minutes in the hope of catching others. When the water becomes coloured, perch go into shallower swims. When the water rises, perch retreat into the eddies, and it is when the river is all but over its banks, and clearing after a flood, and the nights are frosty, and the days open, that the very best perch fishing is had. When the water is low and bright, the sport with the fish, both in summer and winter, is very uncertain. Men who know only a little about fishing are apt to have the idea that perch are always in holes, always in shoals, and, until experience teaches otherwise, that they always feed voraciously. It will be noticed from the

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foregoing remarks, which apply more particularly to good-sized rivers, that these views are incorrect. In very small streams, however, the deeper portions— often called the holes—will nearly always contain the best fish. A hole in a small stream would be a shallow in a large river.'

In swift running water all kinds of fish bite sharper than in

more quiet streams, the reason of course being that their food is whirled rapidly by them, and unless they seize it hurriedly they miss it altogether. When, therefore, perch are on the shallows at the beginning of the season, lying usually between waving masses of weeds, it is a good plan to drop quietly down in a boat, and shoot in a paternoster at every likely spot, leaving it there only a few seconds. Almost immediately the lead touches the bottom, the perch, if feeding and provided it is not alarmed by the approach of the angler, will dash at the minnow and take it down head first.

A few weeks later, when the fish are dropping back into slightly deeper water, a gudgeon on a paternoster may still be used among the weeds, and roving is certainly the best plan for making a satisfactory basket. But if during the early part of the season, or the summer, there should be heavy rains, or the water becomes coloured, then it is a good plan

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A FAMOUS PERCH POOL

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to seek out some spot where the stream flows quietly over a shallow flat, generally to be found where the river widens and forms shallow bays, and fish with Nottingham float-tackle and worms. Two or three such places may be baited up with worms on the previous day with great advantage, and usually a larger run of fish will be caught in this way than when- the water is clear and paternostering is carried on among the weeds.

There are, broadly speaking, two ways of fishing with the worm. The bait may either lie on the bottom, as when we use the ledger or ledger float tackle; or drift down the stream, tripping along over the sand of clean gravel, and suspended by a float. In my experience, perch will take what I may term a tripping or moving worm more readily than one which is stationary. Of course, if the fish are scattered about more of them will see a worm which travels than one which lies stationary on the bottom. On the other hand, if some little hole or nook under a willow bush is baited up, it is as well to have a stationary bait, for fishy little corners like this soon get disturbed if there is much casting in and pulling out of float-tackle.

In July many a fine fat fish is caught from punts by those who lay out floating tackle, baited with a gudgeon, on which perch teed voraciously at

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this season. If perch are known to be plentiful in a few hundred yards of the river, there are few better ways of catching them at this season than by drifting down in a boat, the float-tackle baited with a gudgeon being twenty yards in advance. The bait should be a foot or two from the bottom. The great difficulty I have always found in this method of fishing is to hook the perch. The fish seize the gudgeon sometimes one way, sometimes another, but almost invariably turn it and swallow it head foremost. As the unfortunate bait goes down the throat of the perch, the hook is squeezed tightly against its head, with the result that when the angler strikes he more often than not pulls his hook into the head of the gudgeon instead of into the perch.

One day, after losing several perch in succession from this cause, I tried the experiment of using a two-hook Stewart tackle made up with rather large roach hooks. I put the lowest hook in the mouth of the gudgeon, and left the upper one free. This arrangement I found answered very well, and, oddly enough, the first fish I caught on it was a chub, which took the bait boldly and almost immediately cut it clean in

half with its powerful throat teeth.

In a river which contains both chub and perch it often happens, when paternostering, that a bite is

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felt, the fish is missed, and on the tackle being drawn out of the water half the minnow will be found on one of the hooks. A small jack is usually designated the culprit, but even a large pike, though exceedingly well furnished in the matter of the teeth, cannot cut a bait in half; it can only mangle it. The severance is always due to the throat teeth of some hungry chub.

In late summer and autumn I have sometimes succeeded in catching large shy-biting perch by using a ledger baited with a gudgeon. Ledger-tackle lies on the bottom, and the fish do not see the gut. With float-tackle, on the other hand, every inch of the gut, the shots which weight it, and even the float itself, if the water be clear, are all visible to the fish and doubtless objects of suspicion.

Besides the methods of perch fishing I have enumerated, there is spinning with artificial baits, which I have always found more successful in spring, summer, or early autumn than in winter. Let the tackle be fine, and the bait a rapid

spinner, small and glittering. Very small baits are made for casting with the fly rod, but I will refer to these in the next chapter, for they are more particularly useful for shallow lakes, where the lure can be worked near the surface.

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October is often a first-rate month for perch fishing. One does not then, as a rule, get such days of brilliant sport as occasionally occur in the winter after a big flood, but the fishing is on the whole better, and the meteorological conditions generally more agreeable. In a small river we shall - find the perch in little pools here and there, catching perhaps half a dozen in one place and a few in another. But in big rivers the best places in autumn are under overhanging banks, where the water runs not too rapidly, and particularly where the withy bushes project their branches into the water. Very gently should the punt be dropped down stream, and the paternoster shot in here and there close to the edges of the bushes. Paternostering should now be done in a more leisurely manner than at the commencement of the season, and when a fish is caught another trial should be made in the same place, for the perch are beginning to congregate. Both minnows and gudgeon are still good baits; but as likely as not a few sharp frosty nights will send the gudgeon off the

feed, and they will be unobtainable except with the aid of a cast net. And soon, alas ! the glorious tints of autumn disappear; the withies no longer quiver golden in the westering sun; the land becomes soddened with continuous rain. Inch by inch the river rises,

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and finally, after a terrific downpour, which flows rapidly off the saturated land, becomes yellow and turbid. The time is unpropitious now for perch fishing, but a few enthusiasts will swim float-tackle, baited with lob-worm, round the very small eddies close against the bank, as, for instance, where the horses and cattle come down to drink and there is no great depth—a foot or two of water at the outside. In such resting places fish of many kinds retire to escape from the force of the current, and doubtless also from the filth which it is bringing down. In a day or two the depression passes off, the weather clears, and there is a succession of calm, brief winter days when the sun shines through a yellow haze. The solid matter held in suspension by the winter flood has cleared away, leaving behind it only that colour so dear to the eye of the angler. Now is the time to once more launch the old green punt on the flowing river. Fishing dexterously with paternoster, punting with extreme caution, dropping down from eddy to eddy, and finishing up in the great hole below the eyot, we may make a truly noble bag of perch,

which, by virtue of their cunning, the excellent sport they give, and their excellence on the table, should surely no longer be allowed to rank among our British ' coarse' fish.

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CHAPTER IV

THE PERCH OF STILL WATERS

Unless our young days have been passed in a trout-stream country—such as the northern parts of Scotland, Devonshire, or the green Emerald Isle—the first fish of our youthful days is usually a perch or roach; and in nine cases out of ten its habitat, as ichthyologists love to say, is a humble little pond The laddie in the illustration facing this page is one of a very great clan the members of which are as enthusiastic over their sport and obtain as much enjoyment out of it as the keenest salmon or trout fisher of more mature years.

My first perch came wriggling out of the mill-dam at Godstone, and was caught on one of those fearful and alarming paternosters—fearful and alarming, at least, to any but very small pond perch—by which the tackle makers of the day deluded their confiding customers into spending eighteenpence or even two shillings. I will not put the head of a historic tackle

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firm to the blush by saying how it was at his shop I bought that curious construction of hooks mounted on pig's bristles to make them project, barrel-shaped pieces of pierced ivory on which they revolved, and gut stout enough to hold a salmon. There was, too, a lead of considerable weight at the end. Not a bad gear for sea fishing, perhaps, but to a perch of refined and delicate susceptibility it was an insult. Francis Francis, I think it was, who almost scoffed this tackle out of existence. I say ' almost/ for I have reason to suppose that examples of it may still be found in some of the old-fashioned tackle shops which date from the time when the London citizens, after their day of easy toil, would go, rod in hand, to catch roach or perch from the buttresses of London Bridge. That day on the banks of Godstone mill-pool was a memorable one to me. There came a grown man who I now know was a fraud, but then regarded as an improved form of Izaak Walton. He had brought a can of minnows all the way from London, and with them was going to do great things. He told me to fish with worms, and I remember that I had to dig them first, which I did not like ; but he lent me one of the wonderful paternosters with twirling bristles. And, strange

to say, the perch, which were unaccustomed to minnows but knew the sight of a worm

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came freely to my hooks, and were landed one after the other forthwith—there was no need to play them on such strong tackle—on the banks of the mill-dam. It was an ideal place : a good depth of water and an old decaying camp-sheathed bank. My big friend speedily threw his minnows away in disgust, went and dug more worms, and we almost filled our creels with perch.

We were fishing by courtesy of the miller; but there were one or two people living in. the neighbourhood who took out tickets, or something of the kind, and one of these came down in the afternoon, went to the far side of the pond, and threw out two live baits for jack. He landed a few fish, I remember; and I was immensely impressed by hearing him ask his groom whether the 3-lb. perch which he had caught the day before had been taken up to the Vicarage. I wonder if Godstone mill-pond still holds such monsters. This one was taken on live-bait tackle intended for jack.

Truth to say, there is no great art in catching pond perch, Keep out of sight, bait with worm or gudgeon, and, if they are at all inclined to be shy, throw in a few worms from time

to time. If necessary, bait up a place the day before. An old fisherman told me that he once knew another old fisherman

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who had caught vast numbers of huge perch by sinking a pickle bottle containing a few live minnows, with a piece of perforated zinc over its mouth. The perch would come in their hundreds to examine the caged minnows, and puzzle over the invisible yet hard substance which intervened between them and the little creatures which they deemed intended for their delectation. The fisherman would then lower a baited hook among the puzzled perch, and have grand sport. Francis Francis (I may be forgiven these several references to him, for he was a noted and skilful perch fisher) refers to the idea in terms almost as scathing as those he applied to the paternoster of ancient times, warning perch fishers not to be deluded into borrowing their sisters' gold-fish bowl, covering the mouth with muslin, and sinking it to the bottom of the water in the belief that it would act as groundbait.

Strange to say, other authors recommend the very thing that Francis Francis derided. I had one experience of it—and that, by the way, was in a river— and the trial was made soon after the old fisherman had given me what he described as 'a very valuable tip.' I procured the pickle bottle, caught

the minnows, turned the bottle into an aquarium, and sunk it by the side of a bed of water lilies, carefully marking the spot.

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Next day I went and fished patiently for an hour, without a single bite, all round and about that pickle bottle. Then I hauled on the string and found the minnows dead and bloated. Still, I did not despair of some day proving the utility or otherwise of the apparatus. If tench are to be attracted into a basket trap by a bunch of brightly coloured flowers, surely perch, which are inquisitive fish, will be curious concerning a submerged aquarium. I have often thought that the pickle bottle, if of any use whatever, would be most of all useful in ponds, for there the position of the fish is not so easy to ascertain as it is in rivers, where the angler is guided to the stronghold of the fish by the contour of the bank, the depth of the river, the nature of the bottom, and the colour of the water.

Perch fishing in a lake of a few miles in circumference has many more charms than that afforded by the best stocked pond. The big lakes of the Shannon, for instance, afford most glorious perch fishing, which comes most conveniently at a time when the spring trouting is over and the pike and salmon fishing of autumn has not yet commenced. August, that worst

of fishing months in rivers for almost every kind of fish except gudgeon and chub, is in my experience the best time of all for perching in large lakes; for

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then the big fish leave the deeps and come into fifteen or twenty feet of water.

I once had the good fortune to spend the greater part of the year yachting on Lough Derg, the sailing being subservient to fishing and shooting. It was a delightful time, and in the hot months of the summer we caught many perch. Fish of one size, I noticed, always, or nearly always, went in shoals. Right up on the shallows, in a foot of water, there were hundreds of little perch no larger than a minnow. Then, in two or three feet, would be seen on sunny days the six-inch fish swimming among the stones and weeds. In about ten feet of water, where t he fish were no longer visible, we caught fellows of half a pound or so and in deeper water still, fish running from three quarters of a pound to a pound and a half, according to the depth. I always lament that I never tried the very deep water, with the idea of getting some really big fish. As it was we took nothing over two pounds, but any quantity of good-sized fish.

The native anglers used most primitive tackle— string, a

piece of lead sheeting chopped off roughly with a knife, and what is termed in the village shop ' a ha'penny hook/ the bait being known in Ireland as the blue-head worm. They never had much sport, so far as I could see. But I fared well enough,

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thanks largely to some eel-boys who came down from Athlone to lay night-lines. They taught me to catch perch fry and use them alive as bait. Their modus operandi was very ingenious. First of all we had to find the perch fry by standing in the bows of the boat and slowly punting her over the rocky shallows by the sides of the lake. As soon as a shoal was discovered, one of my men would slide quietly into the water, take the sprit-sail out of the boat, and sink it by means of stones. The mast supported one side of the sail, the oar, placed at an acute angle to it, the other side, while the third side was pressed down to the bottom of the lake by means of stones, a few pebbles being thrown into the centre of the sail to keep that from floating. Then the man would clamber into the boat again and gently take her towards the fry, which he drove before him, very steadily and very slowly, over the sail. Just as they were entering the trap he would slide into the water, and, before the little fish discovered their danger, the sunken edge of the sail was lifted up, and there would be one or two hundred perch fry

swimming about in a kind of canvas bath. The next thing to do, after throwing out the stones, was to get the water out of the sail, and this was a tedious business, for it percolated very slowly through the canvas. Frequently

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the boat's baler was brought into requisition for the purpose, and ultimately the fry were turned alive into a canful of water.

I remember as if it were yesterday one such morning in August, how, after catching the fry, we returned to the yacht, made sail, and reached some five miles up the lake to a wild, desolate bay. There we anchored, and the men rowed me to a spot they knew of by the side of a weed-bed, where we dropped the killick-stone and came to an anchor. We fished with two rods, the man and I, both using paternosters with two No. 7 hooks which were quite large enough for the delicate mouths of the bait.

How the perch bit! Before even our leads touched the bottom we both had fish on; and very soon so plentiful were they that on hooking one we purposely played it as deeply as possible—until the second bait was taken. Thus, more often than not, we brought up a brace of perch at each reeling-in of the line.

The sport ended as suddenly as it had begun. I think there was a change of wind, or some peculiar atmospheric action which affected the fish. I remember, having a curious feeling that something had happened ; a noise had ceased that I had been hearing —some murmuring whisper of the lake had suddenly

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ended; there was a weird and undefinable change. I looked at the man inquiringly; he seemed to have noticed nothing. But the perch had departed and not another bite did we get, though we still tried for half an hour there and in other places. We had only been fishing about two hours, and had between us over six dozen fish, averaging about i lb. each.

In the deep water we nearly always fished with delicate paternosters, and these, I need hardly say, were free from twirling pieces of ivory and hog's bristles, being made of quite fine gut (such as one would use for Derbyshire trout) with a couple of loops tied in it on which the hook-links were fastened. The running tackle, too, was of the finest American line, and I found the large-barrelled Nottingham winch very useful for reeling in quickly. We nearly always fished alongside big beds of weeds, and, strange to say, I never caught a pike when perch fishing in the lake, though pike were fairly numerous. Once, to my surprise, I brought

up a large rudd which had taken the little perch I was using as bait.

The best sport was always to be had on cloudy days when there was a ripple. When the water was calm and the sun shone, the perch were very shy and difficult of capture. At first I was inclined to take the local view of the matter, and abstained from perch

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fishing altogether under such conditions; but one day I tried the experiment of fishing with the finest possible roach tackle—gossamer gut, a large roach hook, three or four shot, and a wee quill float. This ' I threw out as far I could from my boat, seven or eight yards perhaps, baiting the hook with a small perch. In a minute or two the float went under, and very pretty work it was playing on this fine tackle a plump little three-quarter pounder. This fish was not one of those exceptions which proved the rule, for I caught a dozen or more that afternoon and found the method equally successful on other occasions. I think this experience fully disproves the statement of the old angling writers that the perch is always a bold-biter for my paternoster tackle, which was exceedingly fine, was absolutely no use when the water was still and the day bright; and it was only by using this almost invisible gut that I succeeded in catching fish on such occasions. It could

hardly be suggested that perch in such a vast sheet of water as Lough Derg are over-educated.

In big lakes it is not always easy to find perch unless they are exceedingly plentiful, and it is certainly a good plan to bait up two Or three places for a day or two in succession. In private waters, where it is desired to give some good fishing to that occasional

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friend who knows little of angling but has ambitions in that direction, it is a good plan to instruct the gamekeeper to collect worms and throw in a few every day, or every other day, at certain spots. At the end of a month or six weeks fresh fishing places should be chosen and baited up. As a rule, paternoster or float tackle is most useful; but if the bottom is hard gravel or sand, then a ledger may be used. One advantage of the ledger is that the gut, lying on the bottom, is not observed by the fish, which pick up the worm or other bait, and are quite ignorant of the fact that there is a line attached to it. But both the ledger and float-ledger tackle, baited with worms, are more appropriately used when fishing for carp or tench than perch.

Spinning for perch may be practised with very good results in lakes. Whether on fishing intent or not, I generally carry a

few flies, hooks, and artificial spinning baits in my portmanteau; and the last time I was on the Continent, when rowing across the Boden See from Constance to the Duke of Baden's beautiful place on the island of Mainau, I trailed an artificial minnow behind the boat, and was delighted to catch half a dozen fair-sized perch quite different to anything I had hitherto seen. They were of the familiar shape and had the usual bars of colour,

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but the sides and belly were of a bright silvery hue almost like that of a roach.

In Lake Zurich I had a somewhat similar experience. Rowing down the lake from Zurich to a farmhouse where I was to stop for a few days, I again put out my little spinning minnow, and the perch bit freely. I forget now how many I caught, but it was a very satisfactory, not to say useful, bag of fish, for we were far from the sea, and the perch is good eating. In the Irish lakes I rarely caught perch when trolling for pijce or trout, unless I was using a bright, glittering artificial spinner. I have, indeed, caught many more perch on artificial baits than on natural baits. In Lough Corrib and many other waters perch show a marked preference for red. I heard of one large fish which took up its quarters by a yacht's moorings, and refused all kinds of baits until it was

proffered a fragment of red cloth, when it fell.

Somewhat akin to spinning is the use of very small metal baits which are easily cast by means of a fly rod. Some of these are shaped like spoons, others are little more than a pair of silver-plated revolving fans. These are used when perch are shoaling on the shallows, and therefore near the surface, as they are often found in the hot days of summer. I caught a brace on the same fly, if fly it may be called, in the

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Thames one day. Now and again perch will take imitations of natural flies, but can hardly be classed among fly-taking fish. While fishing one day from the rocky shores of Lough Mask I saw a fine rise, cast a small claret and mallard over it, and hooked a lively fish which played well for a few minutes. I quite thought it was a trout of a pound and a half, but it was a perch fourteen inches long. I mentioned the incident to Mr. H. Hodgson, the Hon. Sec. of the L. Corrib Fishery Preservation Association, who recollected that when a lad at Rugby, he had seen some fish rising under the bank of the river near the school, dropped a May fly on to the water and caught several perch. I have often taken these fish on Alexandra flies in lakes and twice in the Thames.

I cannot close this subject without reference to our Irish

vivier. In the Black Forest I had learned the value to the table of a fish-box; and when in Ireland, catching many more lake perch than we could eat, and finding them infinitely better on the day of capture than later on, I adopted the very simple method of placing a dozen or so in a good hamper, tying down the lid tightly, and throwing it overboard. It was, of course, made fast to the yacht with a rope. In this wicker vivier the perch would live an indefinite length of time; a thing well worth remembering

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not only when yachting, but when living near a lake or river. A good new hamper should be used. The fish live in it far longer, and keep in much better condition than in the well of a punt or in the slimy, old, waterlogged, wooden fish-box.

Half an hour before breakfast the hamper would be lifted on to the yacht's deck, a couple of plump fish selected, and their necks rapidly broken. This was done by inserting the thumb in the mouth of the fish, placing the forefinger on its neck, and bending the head back, which is by far the best way of killing a perch. Removing the scales is a matter of considerable toil and the scales fly everywhere, so I did not encourage it either on the yacht or in the yacht's boats. Our perch, therefore, had to be skinned, which was promptly done, and cut in half down the middle, the backbone

extracted, and the two fillets thrown into a pan of boiling butter. I could write much in praise of this sportsman's method of treating newly caught perch, but must not trespass on the province of Mr. Innes Shand, who deals with the whole subject of perch cooking elevated to a fine art in the following chapter.

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COOKERY OF THE PIKE AND PERGH

BY

ALEXANDER INNES SHAND

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COOKERY OF THE PIKE AND PERCH

The pike is a wonderful example of the beneficent alchemy of nature. The tyrant of the fresh water, as old Walton calls him, he is the most voracious of freshwater fishes and the most omnivorous of feeders. His is not the sort of diet the fastidious gourmet would approve for cramming Alsatian geese or fattening cooped-up capons, and yet the results of his promiscuous foraging are not unsatisfactory. He understands his own constitution and digestion, and makes the best of himself and his opportunities. Greedy feeder as he is, he is often excellent eating, though much depends on the age and the breeding ground and very much more on the manner of dressing. The old monkish chroniclers pronounced him 'wholesome meat,' and many modern doctors have agreed with them.

As Walton says, ' the old or very great pike have in them more of state than goodness; the smaller or middle-sized pikes, being by the most and choicest

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palates observed to be the best meat.' Gesner, by the way, goes even further than commending the pike as good eating. It seems that the heart and galls held an honoured place in the mediaeval pharmacopoeia ; they were sovereign specifics

for sundry diseases—'as to stop blood, to abate fevers, to cure agues, to oppose or expel the infection of the plague, and to be many ways medicinable for the good of mankind.'

There are many allusions to the pike in the Roman poets, but he does not seem to have been held in high regard by Roman epicures. On the contrary, we are told that he was relegated to smoky suburban taverns, as the Portuguese peasants of the present day delight in their smoke-dried baccalao from the Newfoundland banks, which, if not very savoury, is undoubtedly nutritious. There may have been good reason for that, as pike swarmed in the Tiber and other Italian rivers. For an Apicius or Lucullus cared for nothing that was not costly, and might have turned with contempt from a clean-run salmon if it had been netted near his palace gates. Whatever may have been the case under a Pagan dispensation, the teaching of the Catholic Church, with the festivals, fast days, and long Lenten seasons brought all fishes into favour. And the pike, with the

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salmon, was in special honour, for with both one could cut and come again. The inland monasteries, with their great establishments and free hospitality, depended on their meres and fishponds as much as on their fields and forests. But a fish diet being somewhat monotonous when prolonged for

weeks at a time, skilled cooks, who had to cater for dainty palates, exhausted their ingenuity on sauces and the fashions of dressing and serving. It was in the wealthy convents that the lamps of cookery, like the lamps of letters, were kept alight through the dark ages, and many of the chefs in the castles of the more luxurious nobles were convent-bred or convent-taught. But in semi-barbarous times, and on solemn festal occasions, state was considered rather than 'goodness,' and size was in itselt a recommendation. In the ' Noble Boke off Cookery/ edited by Mrs. Napier from the Holkham manuscripts, we find the pike—the pik, as it was spelt then, with an economy of letters —figuring conspicuously at the great coronation banquets, when tough old peacocks were served in their gorgeous plumage. At the grand installation feast, when George Nevil, brother of the Kingmaker, was consecrated to the see of York, no fewer than six hundred 'pik* were displayed on his tables. Something of a similar principle still prevails. In the

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menus in Urbain Dubois' monumental work—he directed the kitchens for many years at the Court of Berlin—he seems never to have sent up pike for a small and select party. But at the grand entertainments when the guests were counted by the

hundred, or at the palace balls, where showy ornamental dishes furnished out the buffets, the pike was invariably paraded. He was either dressed in aspic, with elaborate decoration of hatelets, or it was a gros brocket, a la Rtgence, or a la Montebello.

The pike is familiar to the cookery of all European nations, for he is found almost everywhere, though there is a theory that he was not indigenous in the British islands. As a rule, the best trout and the best pike go together, for pike comes to the greatest perfection in swift-flowing and silvery streams. Stoddart, the famous Scottish authority on angling, who should have been a connoisseur in salmon, goes so far as to say that he considered the Teviot pike ' preferable to the general run of salmon captured in that river.' We cannot agree with him, but we have often found the pike a most agreeable change when half surfeited with salmon arid *sea-trout in the Highlands. Many a. day, when the rivers were in spate and the moors unwall^a\)le, have ,we gone out netting and pot-hunting in waterproofs, with one eye on the sport and another

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on the dinner. There was the double interest of watching the dragging of the net, with the floundering of the victims in the bag as it was drawn into the gravelly shallows, and the

careful selection of some eligible fish, weighing from five to six pounds, short in the body, thick in the shoulders, ruddy in the gills, bright in the scales, and springy to the touch. He was crimped forthwith, bleeding deliberately in the ice-cold water, after the scientific prescription of Sir Humphry Davy, and then sent forthwith by messenger to the lodge for treatment by the cordon bleu. Of course pike, like every fish that swims, should be cooked as soon as possible. But it has this in common with the salmon and the cod, that if it be kept cool it is excellent eating on the second day, and indeed when the first and best opportunity has been missed, for a time it rather recovers condition. Chemists say it is never so wholesome as when fresh, and that we may easily believe; but sportsmen and travellers in mountainous districts abroad have generally fair digestions.

For many agreeable reminiscences of the pike are associated with Continental touring. He has not sanctified for pilgrimage any special locality, like the sterlet of the Volga, the trout of the Wolfsbrunnen, the crayfish of Vaucluse, or the oysters of the Lucrine

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Lake, but the cosmopolitan esculent was cropping up

everywhere. In inland hotels, as at the old inland abbeys, he was always turned to account. We do not think he was much in favour in France; we seldom remember to have come across him in the elaborate cartes of the Parisian restaurants, nor did he make a show in the trophies in Chevet's windows. Eugene Sue makes no mention of him in the superb display offish at the stall in his * Gourmandise,' nor did he impress Dumas in the * Impressions de Voyage,' though the versatile Alexander made a study of scientific cookery, like M. Soyer or the Regent Orleans. But pike served with rich stuffing and curious sauces used to be a speciality at ' The Archduke Charles' in Vienna and at the * Munsch' over the way. We have never eaten it in finer condition than on the Elbe banks at Dresden, and the stews at the famous Friday fish dinners at the * Flandres' of Bruges were so good that they must certainly have come from the valleys of the Ardennes and not from those sluggish waters of the Low Countries which are prolific of unapproachable eels. Though the streams of Tyrol and Salzkammergut teemed with trout, there were always releves of pike at Innsbruck and Ischl, and we could go on evoking recollections indefinitely. Many an old-fashioned inn, besides the ' Hecht' at

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Constance, was named after the free-biting fish, which attracted anglers and gastronomists as well, to discuss in a double sense the take of the day at the jovial supper, while they drained their flagons of beer to the memory of the mighty dead. Finally, though Rhine salmon is famous all the world over, there is an old Rhenish proverb about the Rhine pike which says that only the finer Rhenish vintages are worthy of him.

But though personally we have agreeable souvenirs of savoury dishes, the praise of the pike may be easily overdone, and that Rhenish proverb absurdly exaggerates. It Is always a case of the two sides of the shield, and the best of all sauces is a fisherman's appetite. A good pike fresh caught, well chosen, and carefully dressed is a capital dish ; a coarse fish, treated no better than his deserts, is simply detestable. Much depends on the pike being in season. After the spawning in the spring it loses colour and substance, the flesh becomes flabby, and for a time it is absolutely uneatable. It comes slowly into condition again with the warmth of the summer, and is at its best in the fall of the year or even in the early winter.

When pike were served by the hundred at mediaeval banquets doubtless they were sent up au nature!. But already, as we have said, the study of

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cookery as a fine art had made great progress, and the monks, who were masters of the refinements of good living, went the length of dieting the pike, though there was no need to tempt their appetites. They were fattened on eels till, like ' harts of grease,' they came into the highest condition, for no creature lays on fat and flesh faster. Naturally, those spoiled nurslings of the stews had special attention in the kitchen before passing on to the refectory. In the 'Holkham Boke off Cookery' some curious recipes are preserved. Here is one for ' Pyk in Braiselle':

* To mak pik in braiselle chope the pik when he is slit out'—by the way, the slitting out and gutting must always be done as soon as possible—*& let the gebenes hang eche by othere then cast ther on salt & rost it on a gredirn & mak a cerip of the graue of the pik with sugur clowes maces pynes & alay it with chips of bred drond with wine powder guingyure canelle & colour it with saffrin put ther to venygar then lay the fishe in a chargiuir & pour on the ceripe* & serue it.'

The writer does not trouble about punctuation, and the orthography is strangely capricious. * Gebenes' are slices or fillets; pynes are certainly not pineapples, though supposed to be fruit of some sort, and probably mulberries. Then there is a recipe for

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'a Galentyne,— rather what we should now call sousing. You are to seethe the pyk in a good sauce and couch him in a shallow vessel on bread that has been steeped in wine and vinegar, then cast in canelle and powder with pepper and salt, adding onions fried in oil, with ' sanders,' which is supposed to be some piquant pot-herb. ' A pik in Soupes' sounds exceedingly savoury—something of a cross between the Scottish * Fish and Sauce' and the Cockaleekie— a most nourishing Lenten dish for a portly Lord Abbot. It shows, like the first recipe, that these mediaeval store-rooms were amply supplied with costly spices.

' Tak a pik & boile hym with rosemary tym & parsley then make a sherpe sauce of wyne water & ale & tak the resset & chope it small & sethe it with wyne & put ther to clowes maces raissins of corans guinger senymon dates mynced & sugur, &c. &c.'

There are alternative directions for pik in ' Hallok ' brothe, whatever that may have been, a melange which was as luscious and more miscellaneous, and concluding with the instruction to serve the whole pik for a Lord and 'quarto your pik for comons & culpans,' which is somewhat unintelligible. ' Comons' is, we should presume, the

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antithesis to 'Lord,' but then 'culpans* was a synonym for slices.

Walton gives a simple but choice recipe, for he says the dish is too good for any but anglers or very honest men. As pike meat is decidedly dry, we should not ourselves advise roasting, but our fathers had some peculiar notions of cookery,—Pepys always boiled his haunches of venison. Says Izaak : * First open your pike at the gills, and if need be cut also a little slit towards the belly ; out of these take his guts and keep his liver, which you are to shred very small with thyme, sweet marjory, and a little winter-savory; to these put some pickled oysters and some anchovies, two or three, both these last whole, for the anchovies will melt and the oysters should not; to these you must add also a pound of sweet butter, which you are to mix with the herbs that are shred, and let them all be well salted; if the pike may be more than a yard long, then you may put into these herbs more than a pound . . . : then his belly is to be sewed up, so as to keep all the butter in his belly : ... let him be roasted very leisurely, and often basted with claret wine and anchovies and butter mixed together, and also with what moisture falls from him into the pan.'

Then having disengaged him from the framework

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of laths which prevented his falling off the spit, he is to be allowed to subside into the dish he is to be eaten out of, and by this means the pike will be kept unbroken and complete; then to the sauce that is self-contained in the belly and the sauce in the pan you are to add a fit quantity of the best butter and to squeeze the juice of three or four oranges, with cloves of garlic a discretion. We have greatly abbreviated, because the recipe strikes one rather as a curiosity than as a counsel of perfection. The fish is bathed in butter to counteract a process ui gratuitous shrivelling, and is so bedevilled with strong condiments and savoury herbs that all traces of genuine flavour must have vanished* We may criticise the more freely that Walton clashes with his own principles : he expatiates on roasting a pike more than a yard in length, yet, as we have seen, he very sensibly remarks elsewhere that great fish have more of state than goodness. If you have a great fish and mean to make the best of him, Mr. Cholmondeley-PennelFs experience makes an excellent suggestion in his volume on Fishing in the 'Badminton Library; 3 * Anoiher good way of treating large pike is to boil them and let them get cold, when the fleshy or rather fish, will break up easily into flakes, which when fried with a little fr^sh butter, plenty of pepper n\u\ salt

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(added continually whilst frying, N.B.), and dredged over with flour or oatmeal, will be found to make a capital dish.'

Nevertheless a great pike, meant for purposes of ostentation rather than edification, comes in effectively on the buffet of a state supper. Urbain Dubois in his quarto has an imposing plate of the strong-jawed savage, set off on a stand with decorations of skewers, garnished with crayfish, and supported by halves of boiled eggs and aspic. He is to be stuffed with forcemeat and cooked in a court-bouillon with white wine. When cooled and thoroughly drained in the fish kettle, the skin is removed; the fish is sliced, put again into form, and glazed with aspic jelly. The flesh, though firm, is flaky, as Mr. Pennell observes, and to prevent its falling in pieces it must be masked with butter.

A more delicate and inviting dish of M. Dubois' invention is the Filets a la Charles-Quint \ The two fillets of a pike are removed, letting the two rows of small bones remain attached to the principal one. The thick of the fillet is then cut slantwise, beaten and trimmed in oval forms, of equal size. The largest are placed in a saucepan with clarified butter, the others are first masked with a light coating of raw quenelle forcemeat, then sprinkled with chopped

truffles, to be placed in another sautoir^ also with butter. These fillets, being white and black, are cooked to the point

and dished alternately, in circular form, on a crust of paste. He recommends a Normande sauce, composed of veloute with good fish stock, white wine, oysters, and some mushroom liquor. The sauce is beaten up with eggs and butter, but he pronounces the aroma of the mushroom indispensable.

To come down to less pretentious cookery. Here is a good Scotch recipe for stuffing and baking: 1 Having scaled and cleaned the fish'—the cleaning should have been done before it was sent by the fishmonger—'stuff with a mature forcemeat, made thus: beat yolks of eggs, a few oysters bearded and chopped, and two boned anchovies, pounded biscuit or grated bread, minced parsley and a bit of eschalot or onion, pounded mace, black pepper, allspice, and salt* Mix in the proper proportions, and liaving beat a good piece of butter in a stewpan, stir them in it over the fire till of the consistence of a thick butter. Fill the fish and sew up the slit, Bake in a moderate oven, basting with plenty of butter. Serve with anchovy sauce. An excellent forcemeat may be made oi scraped ham or tongue, suet or marrow, eschalot^ cayenne, salt and chopped anchovy, a little walnut or oyster liquor, with egg to bind.'

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Pike, like river or lake trout, may be dressed with advantage a la Gtnevoise, though it does injustice to the more delicate flavour of sea-trout or salmon. 'Clean the fish, but do not scale it. Put a little court-bouillon in a stewpan with parsley roots, cloves, parsley, two bay-leaves, and onions. When these have stewed for an hour, strain the liquor over the pike in a small oval fishpan and add a little Madeira. When boiled, drain it and remove the scales; then put it in the pan with a little of the liquor to keep it moist. Make a thickening, and add veal gravy or white wine, season with chopped mushrooms, parsley, and green onions. Let it stew till smooth; strain the sauce over the fish, with a squeeze of lemon and a little essence of anchovy.'

Cold pike may be filleted the second day, sauced ct la maitre tfhdtel. Stew the fillets in butter with pepper and salt, or use Lucca oil. For the sauce, melt a quarter of a pound of butter and thicken with flour; add a little scalded and minced parsley, with salt, pepper and a squeeze of lemon. Another variation is simply rubbing the slices with pepper and salt, and frying in sweet oil. When cold, pickle in oil and vinegar, with white peppercorns, cloves, and a little mace. Between each piece may be added a few thin slices of onion.

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Baking is, in our opinion, preferable to boiling, but boiling with a good fish may come in as a change, and with due care is within reach of the meanest capacity. Wash the fish, scale it, and plunge it in nearly boiling weak stock of any kind, with a sliced onion, some parsley, a tablespoonful of salt, and a tablespoonful of vinegar \ let it simmer for an hour. Serve on a napkin and with a sauce of a strained pint of the liquor, stirred up with six ounces of butter, kneaded with two spoonfuls of baked flour which has been boiled for five minutes. Chop fine a few gherkins or two tablespoonfuls of capers, and add a tablespoonful of vinegar.

But as pike has no subtle essences to be stifled, and as the flavour may sometimes leave much to desire, it gives scope for the use of rich or rechercte sauces. Brown onion sauce is excellent, and, though piquant, has been highly appreciated by some eminent gourmets. Slice large Spanish onions, brown them in butter over a slow fire, add brown gravy, salt, cayenne, and a bit of butter rolled in brown flour-Skim, and put in a half-glass of good red wine with the same quantity of mushroom or walnut ketchup.

The perch resembles the pike in temperament and in tastes. He is fierce, pugnacious, and voracious* But his favourite food perhaps is the

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minnow, which he generally finds in abundance, though he falls back on occasion on small roach, dace, gudgeon, worms and grubs, and also on frogs. Consequently, while the meat of the pike is strong and full-flavoured, that of the perch is mild, almost to insipidity. Notwithstanding, in former days, when sea fish were seldom forthcoming, he was held in no small repute, both as 'good fysheing and good eating.' Walton says that physicians recommended him as very nutritious, though in the opinion of many he was hard of digestion —which we fancy was a fallacy. Perch abound everywhere in British waters, .except in Wales, and in Scotland to the north of the Tweed In some of the northern lakes, where they swarm, and which are probably overstocked, they run exceedingly small; but they sometimes attain to very considerable size, though we may reject as mythical the stories of monsters killed on the Continent. Neither is size in this case any recommendation, nor do we find that the perch, like the pike, was ever in favour as a ' fish of state.' In our judgment, by far the most satisfactory way of dressing is in a souche. Authors have had little to say in praise of the perch, and even Walton is not enthusiatic, though he has heard that it was much esteemed in Italy. But Dr. Opimian, in

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* Gryll Grange,' an unexceptionable authority on gastronomy, places it first in his list of * presentable ' fishes, and probably not unintentionally. For the Doctor's rectory was on the skirts of the New Forest, and the perch of the Avon and the other Hampshire streams are of the best. Naturally, much depends on the feeding beds, and the perch come to the greatest perfection in swift, limpid water. The heaviest are taken in deep mill pools and sluggish backwater, but they lose in delicacy what they gain in bulk. The Thames appears to be specially suited to them, and in our experience the perch of the Thames is unsurpassed* We have often caught our own dishes of fresh fish when we have dropped into sharp-set shoals between Sun bury and Staines, and our memories of the old Ship Inn at Hall! ford are fondly associated with perch and eels. With perch in smtchi, for perch muckl- is as much a speciality above the locks and the tidal waters as flounder souche at Greenwich or Gravesend.

For water stwehe ; Clean and cut off the heads, put a pint of water into the stewpan with a sali-spoonful of salt, half a saltspoonful of white pepper, a mltspoonful of finely grated horse-radish, three parsley roots cut into shreds j boil ten minutes ; put in the fish (six or eight small fish) with twelve good

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sprigs of parsley; simmer for ten minutes. Some carrot, chopped small, may be added with advantage. A bay leaf may be boiled in the stock, and a dash of flavour may be given with eschalot or essence of anchovy. Serve with thin bread and butter and lemon.

For frying—and fried perch is a capital breakfast dish—dip the fish into beaten egg, then into dried crumbs, and fry in boiling fat till of a bright brown ; fry from six to ten minutes, according to the size. Serve upon paper, with melted butter, slightly flavoured with eschalot or anchovy.

For stewing: Clean the fish; rub them inside with salt and mixed spices. Lay them in the pan and cover them with good stock, with a couple of onions and some cloves, some peppercorns, and a little mace. When they have stewed for a couple of minutes add a couple of glasses of white wine, an anchovy, with the juice of a lemon, and cayenne. Thicken the sauce with butter kneaded in brown flour, and a few pickled oysters may be added. Having strained it, pour it over the fish.

White wine should always go with white fish, and perch may be stewed in Rhenish or Grave, with a very little stock, and a high flavouring of parsley, eschalot, and spices.

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Foreign artists adopt more pretentious methods, and the Seine perch, which with those of the Rhine take the first rank on the Continent, are often served in a matelote, which is generally composed of a variety of river fishes, of which rice masked in a coating of forcemeat is the foundation, and broad slices of carp the base on the rez-de-thaussie* Perch are sometimes cooked in a court&out'Ilon, and often dressed au gratitu But we still maintain that the simplest cookery befits them best, and next to the sou%M recommend plain boiling with a pint of water—sea water if it is to be procured—salt, sliced onions^ some sprigs of thyme, a bay leaf, some parsley and celery, pepper, and a glass of vinegar. Finally, the conclusion of the whole matter is that unless the perch are absolutely fresh they are utterly worthless.

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